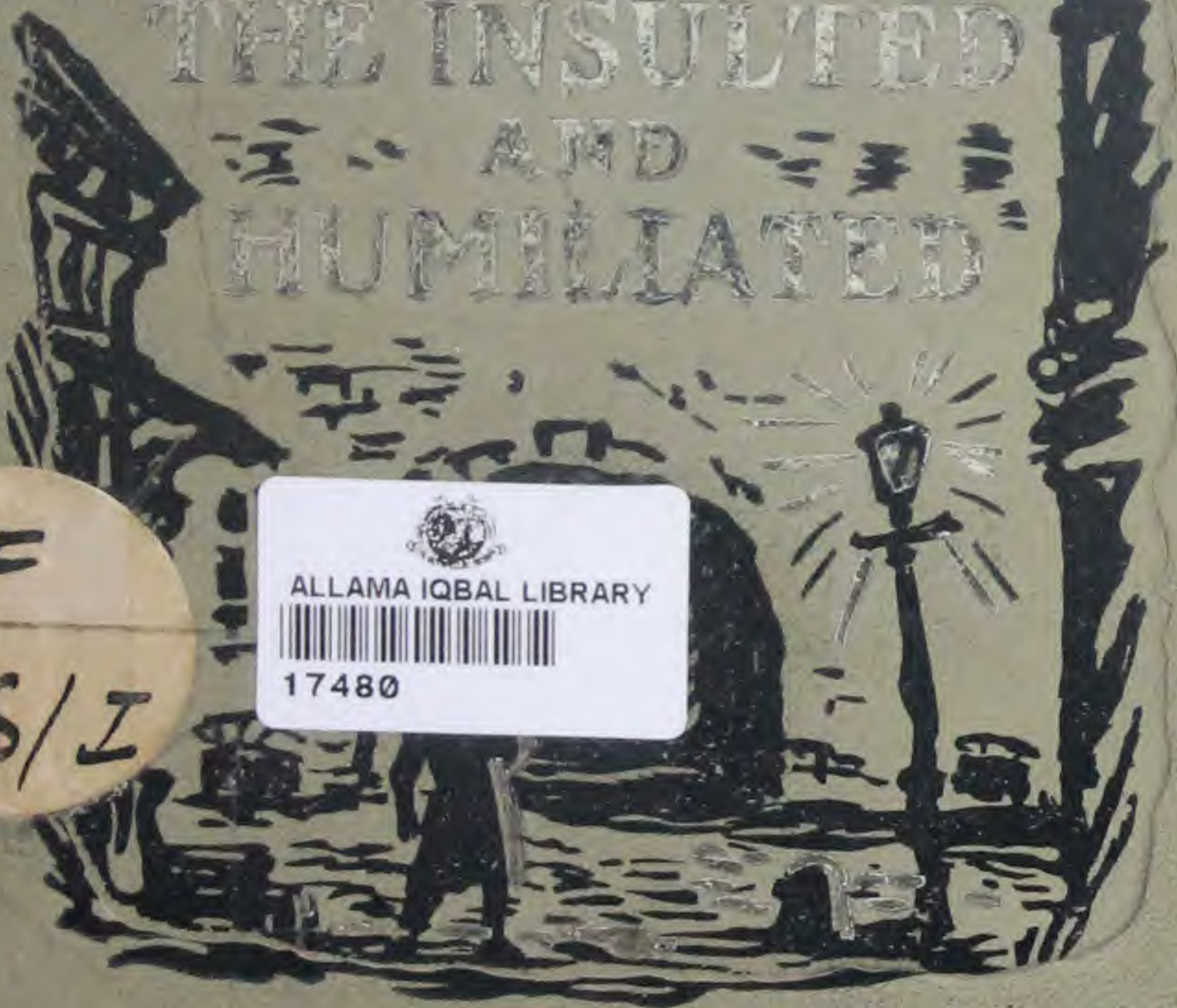


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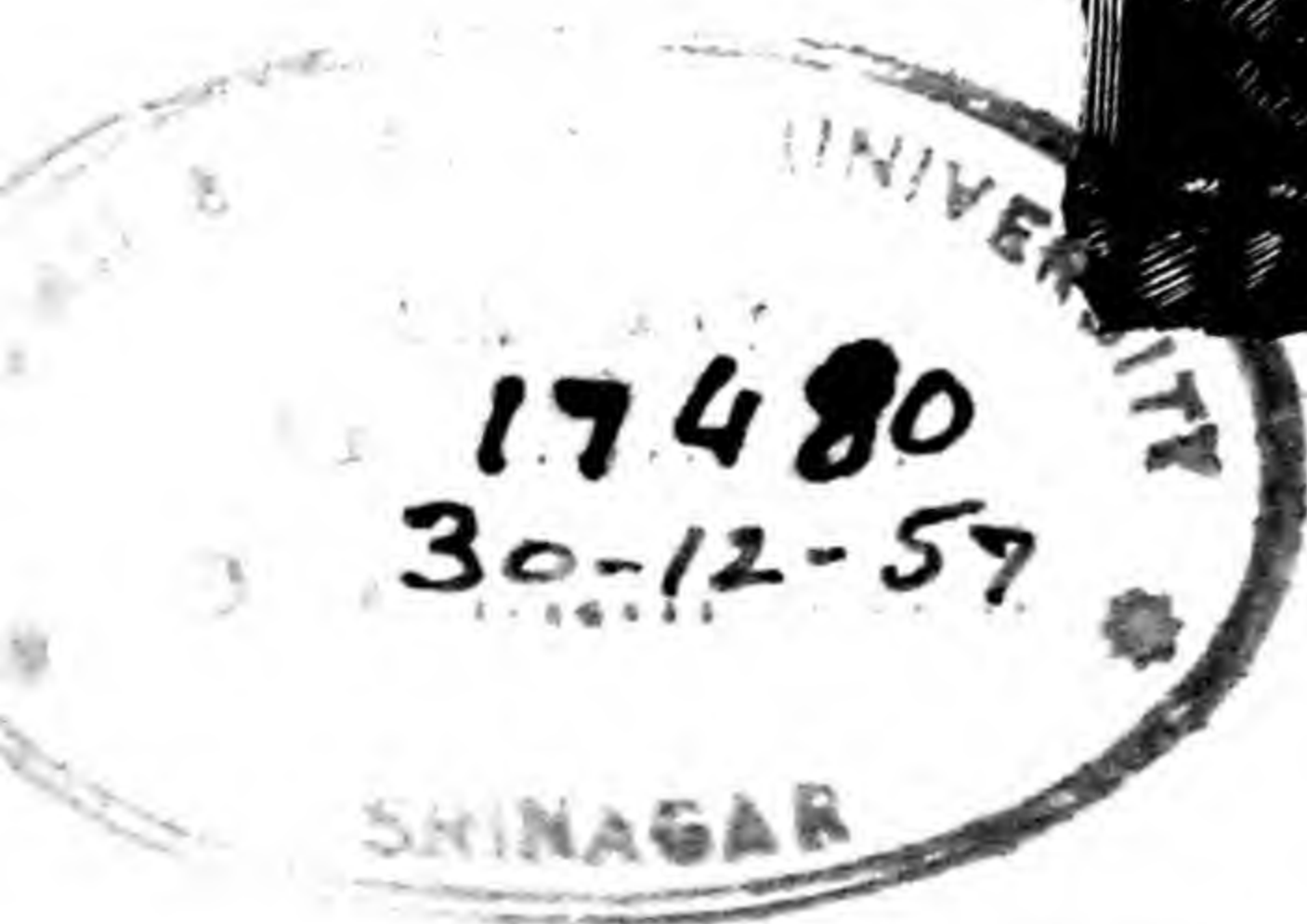
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Москва

Fyodor DOSTOYEVSKY

THE INSULTED
AND
HUMILIATED



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BY OLGA SHARTSE

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BY VALLOTTON FÉLIX

DESIGNED
BY F. KONSTANTINOV

F

Das I

PART ONE



CHAPTER I

Last year, on the evening of March 22, I had a very strange experience. All that day I had been walking about the town trying to find a lodging. My old one was very damp and I was beginning to cough rather ominously. Ever since the autumn I had been meaning to move, but I had dragged it out till the spring. I had not been able to find anything decent all day. In the first place I wanted a separate tenement, not a room in other people's lodgings; secondly, even if it was just one room, it had to be a large one, and, of course, as cheap as possible, too. I have observed that in cramped quarters even thought is cramped. And when thinking over my future stories I liked to walk up and down the room. By the way, I always find it pleasanter to cogitate over my works and dream how they will turn out than actually write them. And this is really not from laziness. Why, I wonder.

I had been feeling unwell all day, and towards sunset I felt really very ill: it was the beginning of some sort of fever. Moreover, I had been on my feet all day and was tired. Towards evening, just before it got dark, I was walking along the Voznesensky Prospekt. I love the March sun in Petersburg, especially at sunset, in clear frosty weather, of course. The whole street suddenly glitters, bathed in brilliant light. All the houses seem to sparkle of a sudden. Their grey, yellow and dirty-green hues for an instant lose all their gloominess; it is as though everything seems brighter, as though you were startled, or someone had nudged you with his elbow. There is a new outlook, a new train of thought. It is amazing what one ray of sunshine can do for a man!

But the ray of sunshine died away; the frost grew sharper, and began to nip my nose; the twilight deepened;

gas flared from the shops. As I reached Miller's, the confectioner's, I suddenly stood stock-still, staring across the street, as though I had a presentiment that something extraordinary was just going to happen to me; and at that very instant I saw, on the opposite side of the street, the old man with his dog. I remember quite well that I felt an unpleasant sensation clutch at my heart, and I could not myself have told what that sensation was.

I am not a mystic. I scarcely believe in presentiments and divinings, yet I have had, as probably most people have, some rather inexplicable experiences in my life. For example, this old man now: why was it that when I saw him then I had an instant feeling that something not quite ordinary would happen to me the same evening? I was ill, however, and sensations in illness are almost always deceptive.

The old man, tapping the pavement with his stick, drew near the confectioner's with his slow, feeble step, moving his legs practically without bending them as though they were sticks. I have never in my life come across such a strange, grotesque figure, and, whenever I saw him at Miller's, I was always painfully impressed by him. His tall figure, his bent back, his death-like face with the stamp of eighty years upon it, his old overcoat torn at the seams, the battered round hat, at least twenty years old, which covered his head—bald but for one lock of hair no longer grey but yellowish-white—all his movements, which seemed performed, as it were, aimlessly, as though worked by springs—all this could not help striking anyone who met him for the first time. It really was strange to see an old man who had so outlived the natural span, all alone, with no one to look after him, especially as he looked like a madman who had escaped from his keepers. Another thing that amazed me was his extraordinary emaciation: he had hardly any flesh left, it seemed there was nothing but skin stretched over his bones. His large,

but lustreless eyes, set as it were in blue circles, always stared straight before him, never swerving, and never seeing anything—of that I feel certain; and even while he looked at you, he walked straight at you as though there were an empty space before him. I noticed this several times. He had begun to make his appearance at Miller's only lately, always accompanied by his dog, and no one knew where he came from. Not one of Miller's customers ever ventured to talk to him nor did he address any of them.

"And why does he drag himself to Miller's, what business has he there?" I wondered, standing still on the opposite side of the street, unable to take my eyes off him. A sort of irritable vexation, the result of illness and fatigue, surged up within me. "What is he thinking about?" I went on wondering. "What goes on in his mind? And does he still think of anything at all? His face is so dead that it no longer expresses anything. And where could he have picked up that disgusting dog, which never leaves him, as if it formed an inseparable whole with him, and which is so like him?"

That wretched dog must have been about eighty, too; yes, it certainly was no less. To begin with, it looked older than dogs ever get to be, and secondly, why did it occur to me, the very first time I saw it, that it could not be a dog like all others; that it was an exceptional dog; that there must be something fantastic about it, something bewitched; that it might be a sort of Mephistopheles in dog-form, and that its fate was in some mysterious unknown way bound up with the fate of its master? Looking at it you would have allowed at once that at least twenty years must have elapsed since its last meal. It was as thin as a skeleton or, which is very much the same, as its master. Almost all its hair had fallen out, and its tail hung down between its legs as bare as a stick. Its long-eared head drooped sullenly forward. I have never

seen a dog as repulsive in my life. When they walked down the street, the master in front and the dog at his heels, its nose would touch the skirt of his coat as though glued to it. And their gait and their whole appearance almost cried aloud at every step: "We are old, old. Oh Lord, how old we are!"

I remember thinking once that the old man and the dog seemed to have stepped out of a page of Hoffmann, illustrated by Gavarni, and were parading this world as walking advertisements of the edition.

I crossed the road and followed the old man into the confectioner's.

In the shop the old man would act in a most peculiar manner, and Miller, standing at his counter, had begun of late to make a wry face whenever this unbidden guest came in. In the first place, the strange visitor never ordered anything. He always went straight to a corner by the stove and sat down in a chair there. If his chair by the stove happened to be occupied, he would stand for some time in vacuous bewilderment before the gentleman who had taken his place, then walk away, with a puzzled air, to the other corner by the window. There he selected a chair, slowly seated himself in it, took off his hat, put it on the floor beside him, laid his stick by his hat, and then, leaning back in the chair, he would remain without moving for three or four hours. He never took up a newspaper, never uttered a single word, nor even a single sound, and simply sat there, staring straight before him with wide-open eyes, but with such a blank, lifeless look in them that one might well wager he saw and heard nothing of what was going on around him. The dog, after turning round two or three times on the same spot, lay down sullenly at his feet with its nose between his boots, heaved a deep sigh, and, stretched out full length on the floor, it too stayed without moving the whole evening as though it had died for the time. One might imagine that

these two creatures lay dead all day somewhere, and with the setting sun they suddenly came to life again, merely to walk as far as Miller's shop thereby performing some mysterious, secret duty. After sitting thus for three or four hours, the old man would at last get up, take his hat and set off homewards wherever it was. The dog too got up, and, with drooping tail and hanging head as before, followed him mechanically with the same slow step. The shop's customers eventually began to avoid the old man in every way and would not even sit beside him, as if he gave them a feeling of repulsion. He noticed nothing of this.

The customers of this confectioner's shop were mostly Germans. They gathered there from all parts of the Voznesensky Prospekt, mostly owners of various establishments: carpenters, bakers, dyers, hatters, saddlers, all patriarchal people in the German sense of the word. Altogether Miller's was run on patriarchal lines. The owner of the shop would often join some customer of his acquaintance at his table, when a certain amount of punch would be consumed. The dogs and small children of the household would sometimes come out to the customers too and the latter used to fondle both the children and the dogs. They all knew one another and had a mutual respect for one another. And while the guests were absorbed in the perusal of the German newspapers, through the door leading to the shopkeeper's rooms came the tinkling of "*Mein lieber Augustin*," played on a cracked piano by the eldest daughter, a little German miss with flaxen curls, very much like a white mouse. The waltz was welcomed with pleasure. I used to go to Miller's at the beginning of every month to read the Russian magazines which were subscribed to there.

As I went in I saw that the old man was already sitting by the window, while the dog, as usual, lay stretched out at his feet. I sat down in a corner without speaking, and

inwardly asked myself why had I come here when there was really nothing for me to do here, when I was ill and it would have been better to hurry home, have some tea and go to bed. Could I have come here simply to gaze at this old man? I was annoyed. "What have I to do with him?" I thought, recalling that strange, painful feeling with which I had looked at him in the street. "And what are all these dull Germans to me? Why this fantastic mood? Why this cheap agitation over trifles, which I have noticed in myself of late, which hinders me from living and taking a clear view of life? One penetrating reviewer had already remarked on it in his indignant criticism of my last novel." But though I brooded over it and deplored it, yet I remained where I was, and meantime I was more and more overcome by illness, until at last I felt reluctant to leave the warm room. I took up a Frankfort paper, read a line or two and fell into a doze. I did not mind the Germans. They read and smoked, and only once in half an hour or so communicated some piece of Frankfort news to one another abruptly, in an undertone, or some jest or epigram of the renowned German wit, Saphir, after which they would plunge into their reading again with redoubled pride in their nationality.

I dozed for half an hour and was waked by a violent shiver. It was definitely time I went home. But at that moment a wordless drama which was being enacted in the room stopped me again. I have said already that as soon as the old man sat down in his chair he would fix his eye on something and not move it to another object the whole evening. I, too, had on occasion been exposed to this aimlessly persistent, undiscerning stare: the sensation was most unpleasant, even unbearable, and I usually changed my seat as soon as I could. At this moment the old man's victim was a small, round, very neat little German, with a stiffly starched stand-up collar and an unusually red face, a new visitor to the shop,

a merchant from Riga, Adam Ivanich Schultz, by name. He was an intimate friend of Miller's as I learned afterwards, but he did not know the old man or many of the customers yet. Sipping his punch with relish and reading the *Dorfbarbier*, he suddenly raised his eyes and saw the old man's immovable stare fixed upon him. It disconcerted him. Adam Ivanich was a very touchy and sensitive man, like all Germans "of the gentlefolk." It seemed to him strange and insulting that he should be stared at so unceremoniously. With stifled indignation he turned his eyes away from the tactless guest, muttered something to himself, and took refuge behind the newspaper. But a minute or two later he could not resist peeping out suspiciously from behind the paper; still the same persistent stare, still the same meaningless scrutiny. Adam Ivanich said nothing this time either. But when the same thing was repeated a third time he flared up and felt it incumbent upon himself to defend his dignity and not to degrade, in the eyes of so gentlemanly a company, the prestige of the fair town of Riga, which, apparently, he felt he represented. With an impatient gesture he flung the paper on the table, rapping it vigorously with the stick to which the paper was fastened, and blazing with dignity, crimson with punch and indignation, he in his turn fixed his little bloodshot eyes on the vexatious old man. It looked as if the two of them, the German and his adversary, were trying to overpower each other by the magnetic force of their stares, and were waiting to see which would be the first to be put off countenance and drop his eyes. The rap of the stick and the eccentric attitude of Adam Ivanich drew the attention of all the customers. All laid aside what they were doing, and with grave and speechless curiosity watched the two opponents. The scene was becoming very comical, but the magnetism of the little red-faced gentleman's defiant eyes was entirely wasted. The old man, quite unperturbed,

went on staring straight at the infuriated Schultz, and absolutely failed to observe that he was the object of general curiosity, as though his thoughts were not on earth but in the moon. Adam Ivanich's patience broke down at last, and he exploded.

"Why do you stare at me so intently?" he shouted in German, in a sharp, piercing voice and with a menacing air.

But his adversary remained silent as though he did not understand and even did not hear the question. Adam Ivanich decided to speak to him in Russian.

"I am askink you what for you at me so studiously starink?" he shouted with redoubled fury. "I am to the court well known, and you known not!" he added, springing up from his chair.

But the old man did not stir at all. A murmur of indignation was heard among the Germans. Miller himself, attracted by the noise, came into the room. When he learnt what it was all about, he thought that perhaps the old man was deaf, and bent down to his ear.

"Master Schultz asked you studiously at him not to stare," he said as loud as he could, looking intently at the incomprehensible visitor.

The old man glanced automatically at Miller and suddenly his face, which had till then been so immovable, displayed signs of some alarming thought, of some uneasy agitation. He grew flustered, bent down, gasping, to pick up his hat, snatched it up hurriedly together with his stick, got up from his chair, and with a piteous sort of smile—a humble smile of a beggar turned out of a seat that he has taken by mistake—he made to leave the room. This meek and submissive haste of the poor, decrepit old man held so much that inspired pity, so much to wring one's heart that the whole company, beginning with Adam Ivanich, at once took a different view of the matter. It was clear that the old man, far from being capable of insulting

anyone, was ever conscious that he might be turned out from anywhere like a beggar.

Miller was a kind-hearted and compassionate man.

"No, no," he said, patting him on the shoulder encouragingly, "sit still. Aber Herr Schultz askink you particularly not to look upon him. He is well known at the court."

But the poor old man did not understand this either; he grew more flustered than ever. He stooped to pick up his handkerchief, a ragged old blue one, that had dropped out of his hat, and started calling his dog, which lay motionless on the floor and was apparently sound asleep with its nose on its paws.

"Azorka, Azorka," he mumbled in a quavering, aged voice. "Azorka!"

Azorka did not stir.

"Azorka, Azorka," the old man repeated wistfully, and he poked the dog with his stick, but it remained in the same position.

The stick dropped from his hands. He stooped, knelt down, and lifted Azorka's head in both his hands. Poor Azorka! It was dead. Azorka died in silence at its master's feet from old age, or perhaps it was from hunger, too. The old man looked at it for a minute as though thunder-struck, as though he did not understand that Azorka was really dead; then he bent down gently to his old servant and friend and pressed his pallid cheek to the dead face of the dog. A minute passed in silence. We were all moved. At last the poor man got up. He was very pale and trembled feverishly.

"You can have it stuffed," began the compassionate Miller, anxious to offer the old man some sort of comfort. "You can have it well stuffed, Fyodor Karlich Kruger stuffs beautifully; Fyodor Karlich Kruger is a master at stuffing," repeated Miller, picking up the stick from the ground and handing it to the old man.

"Yes, I can excellently stuff," Herr Kruger himself modestly confirmed, coming to the front.

He was a tall, lanky and virtuous German, with tangled red hair, and spectacles on his hooked nose.

"Fyodor Karlich Kruger has a great talent to make all sorts magnificent stuffing," added Miller, growing enthusiastic over his own idea.

"Yes, I have a great talent to make all sorts magnificent stuffink," Herr Kruger confirmed again. "And I will for nothink to stuff you your dog," he added in an access of selfless magnanimity.

"No, I will you pay for to stuff it!" Adam Ivanich Schultz cried frantically, turning twice as red as before, glowing in his turn with magnanimity and innocently feeling himself to be the cause of the misfortune.

The old man listened to all this evidently without understanding a word, trembling all over as before.

"Vait! Drink one glass of goot cognac!" cried Miller, seeing that the enigmatical guest was anxious to go.

They brought him the cognac. The old man mechanically took the glass, but his hands shook, and before he managed to raise it to his lips he spilt half, and put it back on the tray without taking a drop of it. Then with a strange, utterly inappropriate smile he went out of the shop with quickened, uneven steps, leaving Azorka on the floor. Everyone stood in bewilderment; exclamations were heard.

"*Schwernoth! Was für eine Geschichte?*" said the Germans, looking round-eyed at one another.

But I rushed after the old man. A few steps from the shop, to the right, there is an alley, dark and narrow, shut in by huge houses. Something told me that the old man must have turned in there. The second house from the corner was under construction and was surrounded with scaffolding. The fence round the house came almost into the middle of the alley, and a footway had been laid

round the fence. In a dark corner made by the fence and the house I found the old man. He was sitting on the edge of the wooden pavement and held his head propped in both hands, with his elbows on his knees. I sat down beside him.

"I say," said I, hardly knowing how to begin. "Don't grieve over Azorka. Come along, I'll take you home. Don't worry. I'll go for a cab at once. Where do you live?"

The old man did not answer. I could not decide what to do. There were no passers-by in the alley. Suddenly he began clutching me by the arm.

"Air!" he said, in a husky, hardly audible voice. "Air!"

"Let's go to your home," I cried, getting up and forcibly lifting him up. "You'll have some tea and go to bed. I'll get a cab. I'll call a doctor . . . I know a doctor. . . ."

I don't know what else I said to him. He made an attempt to get up, but fell back on the ground and began muttering again in the same hoarse choking voice. I bent down more closely and listened.

"In Vasilyevsky Island," the old man gasped. "The Sixth Street. The Six-th Stre-et. . . ."

He sank into silence.

"Do you live in Vasilyevsky Island? But you've taken the wrong way: it's to the left and not the right. I'll take you there directly."

The old man made no movement. I took his hand; the hand dropped as if dead. I looked into his face, touched him—he was dead.

I felt as though it were all happening in a dream.

This incident caused me a great deal of worry, in the course of which my fever passed off of itself. The old man's lodging was discovered. He did not, however, live in Vasilyevsky Island, but only a couple of paces from the spot where he died, in Klugen's house, in the fifth storey right under the roof, in a separate flat, consisting

of a tiny hall and a large low-pitched room, with three slits for windows. He had lived in terrible poverty. His furniture consisted of a table, two chairs, and a very, very old sofa as hard as stone, with stuffing sticking out of it in all directions; and even these things turned out to be the landlord's. The stove had evidently not been heated for a long while, and no candles could be found either. I seriously think now that the old man took to going to Miller's simply to sit awhile in a lighted room and get warm. An empty earthenware mug stood on the table and a stale crust of bread lay beside it. No money was found, not a kopek. There was not even a change of linen in which to bury him; someone gave a shirt of his own for the purpose. It was clear that he could not have lived like that, quite alone, and someone must have been visiting him at least occasionally. In the table-drawer they found his passport. The deceased turned out to be of foreign birth, though a Russian subject. His name was Jeremy Smith, and he was a mechanical engineer, seventy-eight years old. There were two books lying on the table, a short course in geography and the New Testament in the Russian translation, pencil-marked in the margin and scored by a finger-nail. These books I acquired for myself. The landlord and the other tenants were questioned—they all knew scarcely anything at all about him. The tenants in the house were numerous, almost all artisans or German women who let lodgings with board and attendance. Neither was the superintendent of the block, a man of gentle birth, able to say much about the former tenant, except that the lodging was let at six rubles a month, that the deceased had lived in it for four months, but had not paid a kopek for the last two, so that he was obliged to ask him to vacate the lodging. The question was asked whether anyone used to come to see him, but no one could give a satisfactory answer to this. It was a big house, there would be no end of people

coming to such a Noah's Ark, there was no remembering all of them. The porter, who had been employed in the flats for five years and probably could have given some information, had gone home to his native village on a visit a fortnight before, leaving in his place his nephew, a young fellow who did not yet know half the tenants personally. I do not know for certain what was the actual result of all these inquiries but finally the old man was buried. In the course of those days, among the other things I had to attend to, I went to Vasilyevsky Island, the Sixth Street, and only smiled at myself when I arrived there: what was there to see in the Sixth Street but an ordinary row of houses? But why then, I wondered, did the old man talk of Sixth Street and Vasilyevsky Island when he was dying? Was he delirious perhaps?

I looked over Smith's deserted lodging and I liked it. I took it for myself. The chief point about it was that the room was large though it was very low-pitched, so much so that at first I thought I should knock my head against the ceiling. But I soon got used to this. Nothing better could be found for six rubles a month anyway. The privacy of it tempted me; all I had to do now was to arrange for some sort of service, for I could not live entirely without a servant. Meanwhile the porter promised to come in once a day to help me in case of need. And who knows, thought I, perhaps someone will come to inquire after the old man. However, five days had passed since his death, and no one had come yet.

CHAPTER II

At that time, just a year ago, I was still working for some papers, wrote articles, and firmly believed that I should succeed one day in writing something good on a larger scale. I was busy with my long novel at that time,

but it has all ended in my being here in the hospital, and apparently I am soon going to die. And since I am going to die, why, one might ask, write reminiscences?

I cannot help continually recalling all this bitter past year of my life. I want to write it all down, and if I had not found this occupation I believe I should have died of misery. All these impressions of the past excite me sometimes to the pitch of anguish, of agony. They will grow more sober, more harmonious as I write them. They will be less like delirium, like a nightmare. So I imagine. The mere process of writing means a lot. It will soothe me, cool me, arouse anew in me my old literary habits, will turn my memories and sick dreams into work, into occupation. Yes, it was a good idea of mine. Moreover, it will be something for the doctor's assistant to inherit; at least he'll have my manuscript to paste the window with, when he puts in the double frames for the winter.

But I have begun my story, I don't know why, in the middle. If all of it is to be written, I must begin from the beginning. Well, let us begin at the beginning, though my autobiography won't be a long one.

I was not born here but far away in X. province. It must be assumed that my parents were good people, but I was left an orphan in early childhood, and was brought up in the house of Nikolai Sergeich Ikhmenev, a small landowner of the neighbourhood, who took me in out of pity. He had but one child, a daughter Natasha, a girl three years younger than I. We grew up together like brother and sister. Oh, my dear childhood! How stupid to grieve and long for it at five-and-twenty, and on death's bed to recall it alone with rapture and gratitude! In those days the sun was so bright in the sky, so unlike the sun of Petersburg, and our little hearts beat so blithely and gaily then. Meadows and forests were all round us then, not masses of dead stone as now. How wonderful were the garden and park in Vasilyevskoye, where Nikolai Ser-

geich was steward. Natasha and I used to walk in that garden, and beyond the garden was a great damp forest, where both of us were once lost. Happy, golden days! The first foretaste of life was mysterious and alluring, and it was so delicious to make its acquaintance. In those days someone unknown to us, still seemed to dwell behind every bush, behind every tree; fairyland was merged with reality; and when of an evening the mists gathered in the depths of valleys and caught in grey, winding wisps about the bushes that clung to the stony ribs of our great ravine, Natasha and I, holding each other's hands, peeped from the edge into the depths below with timid curiosity, expecting that at any moment now someone would come forth or call back to us out of the mist at the bottom of the ravine; and that our nurse's fairy-tales would prove to be solid established truth. Once, long afterwards, I reminded Natasha how a copy of *Stories for Children* was got for us; how we ran off at once to the pond in the garden to our favourite green seat under the leafy old maple, settled ourselves there, and began reading "Alphonso and Dalinda"—a fairy-story. I cannot to this day remember the story without a strange thrill at my heart, and when a year ago I recalled the first lines to Natasha: "Alphonso, the hero of my story, was born in Portugal; Don Ramiro his father," and so on, I almost wept. This must have seemed awfully stupid, and that was probably why Natasha smiled queerly at my enthusiasm at the time. But I remember she checked herself at once, and began recalling the old days to comfort me. One thing led to another, and she was moved herself. That was a delightful evening; we went over everything, and how I had been sent away to school in the district town—heavens, how she had cried then!—and our last parting when I was leaving Vasilyevskoye for ever. I was through with my boarding-school then and was going to Petersburg to enter the University. I was seventeen at that time, and she

was going on fifteen. Natasha says I was such an awkward, lanky fellow then, that one couldn't look at me without laughing. At the moment of farewell I drew her aside to tell her something terribly important, but my tongue suddenly failed me and clove to the roof of my mouth. She remembers that I was in great agitation. Our conversation was stilted, naturally. I did not know what to say, and, probably, she would not have understood me. I only wept bitterly and so went away without saying anything. We only saw each other again long afterwards in Petersburg; that was two years ago. Old Nikolai Sergeich had come to Petersburg about his lawsuit, and I had only just begun my literary career.

CHAPTER III

Nikolai Sergeich Ikhmenev came of a good family, but one which had long since lost its wealth. However, at his parents' death he inherited a fair estate with a hundred and fifty serfs on it. At twenty he went into the hussars. All went well; but after six years in the army he happened one unlucky evening to lose all his property at cards. He did not sleep all night. The next evening he appeared at the card-table again and staked his horse—all that he had left. His card was a winning one, and it was followed by a second and a third, and within half an hour he had won back one of his villages, the hamlet Ikhmenevka, which had numbered fifty souls at the last census. He did not play any more. He sent in his papers and retired from the service next day. A hundred serfs were lost for ever. Two months later he received his discharge with the rank of lieutenant, and departed to his village. He never in his life spoke of his loss at cards, and in spite of his well-known good nature he would certainly have quarrelled with anyone who dared remind him of it. In the

country he applied himself industriously to managing his land, and at the age of thirty-five he married a poor girl of good family, Anna Andreyevna Shumilova, who brought no dowry at all, but who had been educated in an exclusive boarding-school kept by Mon-Reveche, a French émigré, something Anna Andreyevna prided herself in all her life, although no one could ever divine just what this education had covered. Nikolai Sergeich was an excellent manager. The neighbouring landowners learned to manage their estates from him. A few years had passed when suddenly a big landowner, Prince Pyotr Alexandrovich Valkovsky, came from Petersburg to the neighbouring estate, Vasilyevskoye, which had a population of nine hundred serfs. His arrival made quite a stir in the whole neighbourhood. The prince was still young, though not in his first youth, held no small a rank in the service, had important connections, a fortune, was handsome and, lastly, was a widower, a fact of particular interest to all the maidens and ladies in the neighbourhood. People talked of the brilliant reception given him by the governor, to whom he was in some way related; of how he had turned the heads of all the ladies by his gallantries, and so on, and so on. In short, he was one of those brilliant representatives of aristocratic Petersburg society who rarely make their appearance in the provinces, but produce an extraordinary sensation when they do. The prince, however, was not given to affability, especially with people he had no need in and whom he considered his inferiors at all. He did not deign to make the acquaintance of his neighbours in the country, which at once made him many enemies. And so everyone was extremely surprised when the fancy suddenly took him to call on Nikolai Sergeich. It is true that the latter was one of his nearest neighbours. The prince made a great impression on the Ikhmenev household. He fascinated them both at once; Anna Andreyevna was particularly enthusiastic

about him. In a short time he was on intimate terms with them, went there every day and invited them to his house. He would tell them stories, joke, play their wretched piano, and sing. The Ikhmenevs were utterly puzzled: how could a man so good and charming be called a proud, conceited, cold egoist, as all the neighbours unanimously declared him to be? Apparently the prince really liked Nikolai Sergeich, who was a simple-hearted, straightforward, disinterested and generous man. But all was soon explained. The prince had come to Vasilyevskoye for the express purpose of getting rid of his steward, a prodigal German, a conceited man and an expert agriculturist, endowed with venerable grey hair, spectacles and a hooked nose; yet in spite of these advantages, one who robbed the prince without shame or measure, and what was worse, had beaten several peasants to death. At last Ivan Karlovich was caught in his misdeeds and exposed, was deeply offended, talked a great deal about German honesty, but, in spite of all this, was dismissed and even with some ignominy. The prince needed a steward and his choice fell on Nikolai Sergeich, who was an excellent manager and a man of whose honesty there could be no possible doubt. It seems the prince was particularly anxious that Nikolai Sergeich should offer his services of his own accord. But this did not come about, and one fine morning the prince made the proposition himself, in the form of a most friendly and humble request. Nikolai Sergeich at first refused; but the considerable salary tempted Anna Andreyevna, and the redoubled cordiality of the prince overcame any hesitation he still felt. The prince attained his aim. One may presume that he was a good judge of character. During his brief acquaintance with Ikhmenev he learned to perfection the kind of man he had to deal with, and realized that he must be charmed with a warm and friendly manner, that his heart

must be won, and that money alone would have little effect. And what he needed was a steward whom he could trust blindly for ever so that he need never again visit Vasilyevskoye, which was just what he really planned to do. The fascination he exercised over Nikolai Sergeich was so strong that the latter genuinely believed in his friendship. Nikolai Sergeich was one of those very kind-hearted and naively romantic men who are, whatever people may say against them, so charming among us in Russia, and who, once they come to love someone (God knows why in some cases), devote themselves to the person body and soul, carrying their attachment at times to a comical pitch.

Many years went by. The prince's estate flourished. The relations between the owner of the Vasilyevskoye and his steward continued without the slightest friction on either side, and did not extend beyond a purely business correspondence. Though the prince did not interfere with Nikolai Sergeich's management, he sometimes gave him advice which astonished the latter by its extraordinary astuteness and practical ability. It was evident that not only did he dislike wasting money, but knew how to acquire it too. Five years or so after his visit to Vasilyevskoye the prince authorized Nikolai Sergeich to purchase another splendid estate of four hundred serfs in the same province. Nikolai Sergeich was delighted. The prince's successes, the news of his advancement, his promotion were as dear to his heart as if he were his own brother. But his delight reached a climax when the prince on one occasion actually manifested his extreme trust in him. This is how it happened.... But here I find it necessary to mention a few details of the life of this Prince Valkovsky, who is in a way a leading figure in my story.

CHAPTER IV

I have already mentioned that he was a widower. He had married in his early youth, and married for money. From his parents who had squandered all their fortune in Moscow, he received hardly anything at all. Vasilyevskoye was mortgaged over and over again. It was encumbered with enormous debts. At twenty-two the prince, who was forced at that time to take service in a government department in Moscow, had not a kopek, and he was starting on his career as the "beggar offspring of an ancient line." His marriage to the over-ripe daughter of a tax-contractor saved him.

The contractor, of course, cheated him over the dowry, but anyway, he was able to pay the mortgage on his estate with his wife's money, and to get on to his feet again. The contractor's daughter was almost illiterate, could hardly put two words together, was ugly, and had only one redeeming feature: she was submissively kind-hearted. The prince took the utmost advantage of this quality in her. After the first year of marriage he left his wife, who had meanwhile born him a son, at Moscow, in charge of her father, the contractor, and went off to serve in the X. province, where, through the influence of a powerful relation in Petersburg, he obtained quite a prominent post. His soul yearned for distinction, advancement, a career, and realizing that with the wife he had he could not live either in Petersburg or Moscow, he resolved to begin his career in the provinces until something better turned up. It is said that even in the first year of his marriage his brutal treatment of his wife almost drove her to her grave. This rumour always angered Nikolai Sergeich, and he hotly defended the prince, declaring that he was incapable of a mean action. But some seven years later the prince's wife died at last and the bereaved husband immediately returned to Petersburg.

He actually caused some little sensation there. With his fortune, his good looks and his youth, his many brilliant qualities, his undeniable wit, his taste, and his unfailing gaiety he appeared in Petersburg not as a fortune-seeker, but as a man in a fairly independent position. It is said that there really was something fascinating about him; something dominating and powerful. He was extremely attractive to women, and an intrigue with a society beauty gave him a scandalous renown. He spent money lavishly in spite of his innate prudence which almost amounted to niggardliness; he lost money at cards to men of importance, and could even part with huge sums without turning a hair. But he had not come to Petersburg for the sake of amusement. He was bent on making his career and finally establishing his position. He attained this object. Count Nainsky, his distinguished relative, who would have taken no notice of him if he had come as an ordinary applicant, amazed by his success in society, found it suitable and possible to show him particular attention, and even condescended to take his seven-year-old son to be brought up in his house. To this period belongs the prince's visit to Vasilyevskoye and his acquaintance with the Ikhmenevs. Securing at last, through the influence of the count, a prominent post in one of the most important embassies, he went abroad. Later, news of him grew somewhat murky: there was talk of some unpleasant adventure that had befallen him abroad, but no one could tell exactly what it was. It was only known that he succeeded in adding an estate of four hundred serfs to his holdings, as I have mentioned already. It was many years later that he returned from abroad, holding a high rank in the service, and he at once received a very prominent post in Petersburg. Ikhmenevka was rife with rumour that he was about to make a second marriage which would connect him with a wealthy, distinguished and powerful family. "He'll be a courtier next!" said

Nikolai Sergeich, rubbing his hands with pleasure. I was in Petersburg then, at the University, and I remember Ikhmenev writing me specially to find out whether the rumour was true. He wrote to the prince, too, to solicit his patronage for me, but the prince left the letter unanswered. I only knew that the prince's son, who had been brought up first in the count's household and afterwards at the lycée, had now completed his course of study at the age of nineteen. I wrote about this to the Ikhmenevs and also mentioned that the prince was very fond of his son, and spoilt him, and was already making plans for his future. All this I had learnt from fellow-students who knew the young prince. It was about this time that one fine morning Nikolai Sergeich received a letter from Prince Valkovsky that greatly astonished him.

The prince who had till then, as I have mentioned already, confined himself to dry business correspondence with Nikolai Sergeich, now wrote to him about his family affairs in great detail, and in a way that was most frank and friendly. He complained of his son, said that the boy was grieving him by his misconduct, that of course the pranks of such a lad were not to be taken too seriously (he was obviously trying to justify him), but that he had made up his mind to punish his son, to teach him a lesson, that is, exile him for some time into the country in charge of Ikhmenev. The prince wrote that he put his entire trust in "his kind-hearted, generous Nikolai Sergeich, and particularly in Anna Andreyevna." He begged them both to receive the young scapegrace into their family, to put some sense into him away from the temptations of the city, to love him if they could, and above all, to correct his frivolous character and "instil in him the strict and salutary principles so essential to the conduct of life." Old Ikhmenev, of course, undertook the task with enthusiasm. The young prince arrived. They welcomed him like a son. Nikolai Sergeich very soon

grew as fond of him as of his own Natasha. Even later on, after the final breach between the boy's father and Nikolai Sergeich, the latter would sometimes recall his Alyosha affectionately, as he was accustomed to call Prince Alexei Petrovich. He really was a very charming boy; handsome, delicate and high-strung like a woman, but at the same time he was merry and simple-hearted, with a soul ready and capable of the noblest feelings, a loving heart—candid, and grateful. He became the idol of the household. In spite of his nineteen years he was a perfect child. It was difficult to imagine what his father, who, it was said, loved him so much, could have banished him for. Rumour had it that he had led an idle and frivolous life in Petersburg, had refused to enter the service and thus had disappointed his father. Nikolai Sergeich did not question Alyosha, since the prince had evidently been reticent in his letter as to the real cause of his son's banishment. There was talk, however, of some unpardonable escapade of Alyosha's, of some intrigue with a lady, of some challenge to a duel, of some incredible loss at cards; mention was even made of his having squandered other people's money. There was also a rumour that the prince had decided to remove his son for no misdeed at all, but merely from certain purely egoistic motives. Nikolai Sergeich indignantly denied this rumour, especially since Alyosha was extraordinarily fond of his father, whom he had not known throughout his childhood and boyhood. He talked of him with admiration and enthusiasm; it was evident that he was completely under his influence. Alyosha chattered sometimes, too, about a countess with whom both he and his father were flirting, and told how he, Alyosha, had cut his father out, and how dreadfully vexed his father was about it. He always told this story with delight, with childlike simplicity, with clear, merry laughter, but Nikolai Sergeich checked

him at once. Alyosha also confirmed the report that his father was intending to marry.

He had already spent nearly a year in exile, writing his father respectful and sensible letters at stated intervals, and eventually grew so accustomed to Vasilyevskoye that when his father came in the summer (giving Nikolai Sergeich early warning of his visit), the exile himself begged his father to let him remain as long as possible at Vasilyevskoye, declaring that a country life was his real vocation. All Alyosha's impulses and decisions were the fruit of an excessive, nervous impressionability, a warm heart, and an irresponsibility which at times almost approached inanity, an extreme susceptibility to every kind of external influence and a complete absence of will. But the prince listened somewhat suspiciously to his request. Altogether Nikolai Sergeich could hardly recognize his former "friend": Prince Valkovsky was greatly altered. He suddenly became peculiarly captious with Nikolai Sergeich; when they went over the accounts of the estate he betrayed a revolting greed, a niggardliness, and an incomprehensible mistrustfulness. All this hurt the good-hearted Ikhmenev very much, for a long time he refused to believe his own senses. Everything this time was just the reverse of what it had been during the prince's first visit, fourteen years before: this time the prince made friends with all his neighbours, that is, the more important ones. He never once called on Nikolai Sergeich, and treated him as one of his subordinates. And then something quite inexplicable happened: without any apparent reason a violent quarrel took place between the prince and Nikolai Sergeich. Heated, insulting words were overheard, uttered on both sides. Ikhmenev indignantly left Vasilyevskoye, but the quarrel did not stop there. A revolting scandal suddenly spread all over the neighbourhood. It was asserted that Nikolai Sergeich, having seen through the young prince's character, was scheming to

take advantage of his failings towards his own ends; that his daughter, Natasha (who was then seventeen) had contrived to make the twenty-year-old boy fall in love with her, that the parents had fostered this love affair though they had pretended to notice nothing, that the scheming and "immoral" Natasha had at last bewitched the youth completely, who by her efforts had for a whole year been kept away from any of the really eligible young ladies blossoming so abundantly in the respectable households of the neighbouring gentry. Finally, it was asserted that the lovers had already arranged to be married at the village of Grigoryevo, fifteen versts from Vasilyevskoye, ostensibly without the knowledge of Natasha's parents, but who, in fact, knew all about it to the smallest detail and were encouraging their daughter with their abominable suggestions. In short, a whole volume could not hold all the slander that the local gossips of both sexes had contrived to fabricate on this subject. But what was most remarkable was that the prince believed all this implicitly, and had indeed come to Vasilyevskoye for this sole reason, having received an anonymous letter about it from the province. One would have thought that no one who knew Nikolai Sergeich at all could have believed a word of all the accusations made against him; and yet, as is always the case, everyone was excited, everyone was talking, and, though they did not vouch for the story, they shook their heads and ... condemned him absolutely. Ikhmenev was too proud to defend his daughter to the gossips, and sternly forbade his Anna Andreyevna to enter into any explanations with the neighbours. Natasha herself, who was so libelled, knew nothing of all this gossip and accusations till fully a year afterwards: the whole story had been carefully concealed from her, and she was as gay and carefree as a child of twelve.

Meanwhile the quarrel developed further and further. Busybodies lost no time. Informers and witnesses came

forward and succeeded in convincing the prince at last that in Nikolai Sergeich's long years of stewardship at Vasilyevskoye he had by no means been a paragon of honesty, and what is more, that three years before, Nikolai Sergeich had embezzled twelve thousand rubles over the sale of the copse, that unimpeachable evidence of this could be brought before the court, especially as he had received no legal authorization for the sale from the prince, but had acted on his own judgement, persuading the prince afterwards of the necessity of the sale, and presenting him with a much smaller sum than he had actually received for the copse. Of course all this was only slander, as was proved later on, but the prince believed it all and called Nikolai Sergeich a thief in the presence of witnesses. Ikhmenev would not stand for it and reciprocated in terms as insulting: a horrible quarrel took place. A lawsuit immediately followed. Nikolai Sergeich, lacking certain documents, and having neither powerful patrons nor experience in litigation, at once found himself playing a losing hand. A distraint was laid on his property. The exasperated old man threw up everything and resolved at last to move to Petersburg to contend his case personally, leaving an experienced agent to look after his interests in the province. The prince, it seems, began to realize quite soon that he had insulted Nikolai Sergeich unnecessarily. But the insult on both sides had been so deadly that there could be no talk of reconciliation, and the infuriated prince exerted himself to the utmost to get the best of it, that is, actually, to deprive his former steward of his last crust of bread.

CHAPTER V

And so the Ikhmenevs moved to Petersburg. I shall not describe my meeting with Natasha after our long separation. All through those four years I had never for-

gotten her. Of course I myself did not quite understand the feeling with which I thought of her, but when we met again I soon realized that fate had destined her to be mine. During the first days after their arrival I was under the impression that she had not developed much in those four years or changed at all, and was just the same little girl as she had been at our parting. But then I began to divine something new in her every day, something of which I had known nothing, as though it had been intentionally concealed from me, as though the woman behind the girl were hiding from me purposely—and what ecstasy there was in each discovery.

The old man, having moved to Petersburg, was irritable and choleric at first. Things were going badly with him. He stormed and raged, busied himself with various documents, and could not be bothered with us. Anna Andreyevna wandered about like one distraught, and at first could not collect her wits. Petersburg alarmed her. She sighed and shrank in fear, she wept for her old way of life, for Ikhmenevka, worried that Natasha was eligible for marriage now, yet there was no one to think about her, and she lapsed into strange confidences with me for lack of a more suitable recipient of them.

It was just then, not long before their arrival, that I finished my first novel, the one with which my literary career began, and being a novice I did not know at first who to offer it to. I said nothing about it at the Ikhmenevs, while they all but quarrelled with me for leading an idle life, that is, not being in the service and not trying to find a position. The old man scolded me bitterly and even testily, but only from fatherly solicitude, of course. And I was simply ashamed to tell him what I was doing. How was I to tell them straight out that I did not want to enter the service, but wanted to write novels? And so I deceived them for the time, saying that I had not found a post, but was looking for one as hard as I could. He had no time to

go into it. I remember that one day Natasha, who had listened to our conversations, drew me aside mysteriously and besought me with tears to think of my future. She questioned me and tried to discover what I was doing exactly, and when I refused to reveal my secret even to her, she made me swear that I would not ruin myself by being an idler and a loafer. And although I did not confess what I was doing even to her, I remember that I felt I would have exchanged all the most flattering remarks of the critics and the connoisseurs which I heard about myself afterwards for one word of approval from her. And then at last my novel* came out. It raised a tumult in the literary world long before its appearance. B. was as pleased as a child when he read my manuscript. No! If I was ever happy it was not even in the first intoxicating moments of my success, but before I had ever read or shown my manuscript to anyone; it was in those long nights spent in exalted hopes and dreams and passionate love of my work; when I had grown into one with the plot of my fancy, and come to look upon the characters I myself had created, as though they were my family, as though they were real people; I loved them, I rejoiced and grieved with them, and sometimes I even shed genuine tears over my artless hero. And I cannot describe how glad the old people were of my success, though at first they were awfully surprised: it struck them as so very strange! Anna Andreyevna, for instance, could not bring herself to believe that the new writer who was being praised by everyone was no other than the very same Vanya who had done this and that and the other, and she kept shaking her head over it. The old man did not come round for some time, and at the first rumour of it was positively alarmed; he began to talk of a lost career, of the disorderly conduct of authors in general. But the new reports

* Dostoyevsky's first novel, *Poor Folk*, and its reception by Belinsky, is here suggested.—*Tr.*

that were continually coming in, the paragraphs in the papers, and finally some words of praise uttered about me by persons whom he trusted reverentially, forced him to change his attitude. And when he saw that I suddenly had plenty of money and heard the fee one might get for literary work, his last doubts vanished. Rapid in his transitions from doubt to full enthusiastic faith, rejoicing like a child at my good fortune, he suddenly rushed to the other extreme and indulged in unbridled hopes and most dazzling dreams of my future. He visualized new possibilities and plans for me each day, and what did he not dream of in those plans! He even began to show me a peculiar sort of respect which he had never done before. But nevertheless, I remember, doubt would sometimes assail and perplex him suddenly, often in the midst of his most rapturous dreamings.

"A writer, a poet. It seems strange somehow. When has a poet made his way in the world, risen to high rank? They're only scribbling fellows after all, an unreliable lot.

I noticed that such doubts and ticklish questions generally occurred to him at dusk (how well I remember all these details and all that happy time!). Towards dusk my old friend always grew uncommonly nervous, susceptible and mistrustful. Natasha and I knew it by now and made mild fun of this beforehand. I remember I tried to cheer him up by telling him tales of Sumarokov being made a general, of Derzhavin having been presented with a snuff-box full of gold pieces, of how the Empress herself had visited Lomonosov; I told him about Pushkin, about Gogol.

"I know, my boy, I know it all," the old man replied, though perhaps it was the first time he had heard these stories. "Hm! But look here, Vanya, I'm glad your stuff isn't poetry at least. Poetry is nonsense, my boy; don't you argue, but believe an old man like me; I wish you nothing but good; it's pure rubbish, idle waste of time!

Writing poetry is only good enough for schoolboys; poetry brings lots of you young fellows to the madhouse. Granting Pushkin is a great man, that's beside the point! Still, it's all jingling verse and nothing else. Just an ephemeral something. Though indeed I have read very little of it. Now prose is a different matter! A prose writer may even be instructive—well, he might put in something about patriotism for instance, or about virtue in general. Yes! I don't know how to express myself, my boy, but you understand me; I speak from my heart. But there, there, read!" he concluded with a certain air of patronage, when at last I had brought the book and we were all sitting at the round table after tea, "read us what you've scribbled; they're making a great deal of fuss about you! Let's hear it! Let's hear it!"

I opened the book and prepared to read. My novel had come from the printer's only that day, and having at last got hold of a copy, I rushed round to read it to them.

How vexed and grieved I had been that I could not read it to them earlier from the manuscript which was in the editor's hands! Natasha had actually cried with chagrin, she quarrelled with me and reproached me with letting other people read it before she had.... But now at last we were sitting round the table. The old man assumed a particularly serious and critical expression. He wanted to judge it very, very strictly "to make sure for himself." The old lady, too, looked exceptionally solemn; I almost believe she had put on a new cap for the reading. She had long noticed that I looked with boundless love at her precious Natasha; that my breath caught and my vision dimmed when I addressed her, and that Natasha, too, now glanced at me with a brighter look than before. Yes! At last the time had come, had come at the moment of success, of golden hopes and of the most perfect happiness, all, all had come at once. The old lady had noticed, too, that her old man had begun to praise me excessively, and

cast peculiar sort of looks at his daughter and me. And all of a sudden she took fright; after all I was not a count, nor a lord, nor a reigning prince, nor even a general— young and handsome with a string of orders on his breast. Anna Andreyevna was not in the habit of stopping half-way in her wishes.

“The man’s praised,” she thought about me, “but there’s no knowing what for. An author, a poet. But what is an author after all?”

CHAPTER VI

I read them my novel at one sitting. We began immediately after tea and stayed up till two o’clock in the morning. The old man frowned at first. He was expecting something infinitely lofty, something that he himself would probably fail to understand, but lofty it had to be; and instead, he suddenly heard such commonplace, familiar things—precisely such as were happening about him every day. And if only the hero had been a great or interesting man, or something historical like Roslavlev, or Yury Miloslavsky; instead of that he was described as a little, downtrodden and even rather stupid clerk, with the very buttons missing from his uniform; and all this written in such simple language, no better than we talk ourselves. Strange! The old lady threw puzzled glances at Nikolai Sergeich, and even pouted a bit as though she were resentful. “Is it really worth while to print and listen to such nonsense, and they pay money for it, too,” was written on her face. Natasha was all attention, she listened greedily, never taking her eyes off me, watching my lips as I pronounced each word, moving her own pretty lips after me. And what do you think happened? Before I had read half of it, tears were streaming from the eyes of all the three listeners. Anna Andreyevna was crying sincerely, sorry for my hero with all her heart, and long-

ing with great naïveté to help him in some way out of his troubles, as I gathered from her exclamations. The old man had already abandoned all hopes of anything elevated. "From the first step it's clear that you'll never be at the top of the tree; it's a middling little story; but it wrings your heart," he said, "and you come to understand and see what's happening all round you, and you realize that the most downtrodden, humblest man is a man, too, and a brother of yours."

Natasha listened, cried, and furtively squeezed my hand under the table. The reading was over. She got up, her cheeks were flushed, tears stood in her eyes. All of a sudden she snatched my hand, kissed it, and ran out of the room. The father and mother looked at one another.

"Hm! Fancy her being so impulsive!" said the old man amazed at his daughter's action. "But it's all right, though, it's a good thing, it's good, it's a generous impulse! She's a kind girl..." he muttered, looking askance at his wife as though to justify Natasha and at the same time somehow wanting to acquit me too.

As for Anna Andreyevna, although she, too, had been rather agitated and moved during the reading, she looked now as if she were about to say: "Of course Alexander of Macedon was a hero, but why break the furniture?"* etc.

Natasha soon came back, gay and happy, and going past me gave me a sly pinch. The old man attempted to play the stern critic of my novel again, but in his joy he was carried away and could not keep up his part.

"Well, Vanya, my boy, it's good, it's good! You've delighted me! Pleased me more than I expected. It's not elevated, it's not great, that's evident. Over there, there lies the *Liberation of Moscow*, it was written in Moscow, you know. Well, there you can see from the first line, my boy, that the author, so to speak, soars like an eagle. But,

* Reference to Gogol's *Inspector General*.—Tr.

do you know, Vanya, yours is somehow simpler, easier to understand. That's why I like it, because it's easier to understand. It's more akin to us as it were; it's like it had all happened to my own self. And what's the use of the high-flown stuff? You wouldn't have understood it yourself. I should improve the style if I were you, though. I'm praising it, but say what you will, it's not lofty enough. But there, it's too late now, it's printed, unless perhaps there's a second edition? But I say, my boy, I suppose it *will* go into a second edition! Then there'll be money again! Hm!"

"And can you really have got so much money for it, Ivan Petrovich?" observed Anna Andreyevna. "I look at you and somehow can't believe it. Mercy on us, just think what people will give money for nowadays!"

"You know, Vanya," said the old man, growing more and more enthusiastic, "it's a career after all, though it's not the service. Eminent persons will read it too. Here you were telling me Gogol receives a yearly allowance and was sent abroad. What if you did too? Or would it be too soon? Must you write something more? Then write it, my boy, write it as quickly as possible. Don't rest on your laurels. What's stopping you?"

And he said this with such an air of conviction, with such good nature that I couldn't bring myself to stop him and throw cold water on his dreams.

"Or they may be giving you a snuff-box for instance. Why not? Grace knows no measure! They'll want to encourage you. And who knows, maybe you'll be presented at court," he added in a half whisper, screwing up his left eye meaningfully; "or not? Is it too soon for the court?"

"The court, indeed!" said Anna Andreyevna, as if affronted.

"In another minute you'll be promoting me to a general," I answered, laughing heartily.

The old man laughed too. He was exceedingly pleased.

"Your Excellency, won't you have something to eat?" playfully cried Natasha, who had meantime been getting supper ready for us.

She burst out laughing, ran to her father and flung her warm arms round him.

"Dear, kind Papa!"

The old man was moved.

"Well, well, enough, enough! I speak in the simplicity of my heart. General or no general, come to supper. Ah, you sentimental girl!" he added, patting his Natasha on her flushed cheek, as he was fond of doing on every convenient occasion. "I spoke from my heart, Vanya, you know. But even if not a general (far from it!) you're a distinguished man anyway, an author."

"Nowadays they call them writers, Papa!"

"Not authors? I didn't know. Well, let it be writers then, but what I wanted to say was this: they won't make you Kammerherr, of course, for having written a novel; it's no use dreaming of that; but anyway you may get up in the world; become an attaché or something. They may send you abroad, to Italy, for your health, or to perfect yourself in your studies perhaps; you'll be helped with money. Of course you've got to do your part honourably too; it must be work, real work, that you'd receive the money and tribute for, and not through patronage or something."

"And don't you get too proud then, Ivan Petrovich," added Anna Andreyevna, laughing.

"You'd better give him a star, at once, Papa; after all, what is a mere attaché?"

And she pinched my arm again.

"This girl keeps making fun of me," said the old man, looking lovingly at Natasha, whose cheeks were glowing and whose eyes were shining brilliantly like stars. "I think I really may have overshot the mark, children; but

I've always been like that. But do you know, Vanya, I keep wondering at you: you really are too simple."

"Why, good heavens, Papa, what else could he be?"

"Oh, no, that's not what I meant. Only, Vanya, your face . . . er . . . you know. . . . I mean it doesn't look a poetical sort of face. They're pale, they say, you know, the poets, with long hair, you know, and a something in their eyes . . . like some Goethe or other, you know. I've read that in *Abaddonna*.* Eh? Have I said something wrong again? Ah, look at the naughty one—laughing at me like that! I'm not a scholar, my dears, but I can feel. Well, face or no face, that's no great matter, yours is all right for me, and I like it very much. That's not what I wanted to say . . . at all. . . . Only be honest, Vanya, be honest, that's the main thing, live honestly, don't let all this turn your head. The road lies open before you. Do your work honestly, that's what I meant to say; yes, that's just what I wanted to say!"

It was a wonderful time! Every evening, every free hour I spent with them. I brought the old man news of the literary world and of writers, in whom he began, I don't know why, to take a great interest. He even began to read the critical articles of B., about whom I talked a great deal, whom he scarcely understood but praised ecstatically, and inveighed against his enemies who wrote in the *Northern Drone*.

The old lady kept a sharp eye on me and Natasha, but she didn't see everything. One little word had been uttered between us already, and at last I heard Natasha, with lowered head, and lips half parted, whisper: "Yes." The old people learnt of it too; they thought and pondered over it; Anna Andreyevna shook her head for a long time: it seemed strange and frightening to her. She had no faith in me.

* *Abaddonna*—a romantic story by N. A. Polevoi (1796-1846).
—Ed.

"Yes, it's all right, of course, if your work is a success, Ivan Petrovich," she said, "but what if it's a failure or something, what then? If only you had a post somewhere!"

"Now, this is what I've got to say to you, Vanya," said the old man, coming to a decision. "I've seen for myself, I've noticed it and I confess I was rather glad that you and Natasha . . . you know what I mean. But you see, Vanya, you're both very young, and my Anna Andreyevna is right. Let us wait a bit. Granted you have talent, remarkable talent perhaps . . . well, not genius, as they cried out about you at first, but just simply talent (I read that article in the *Drone* about you today; they handle you too roughly, but after all, it's not much of a paper). Yes! But then you see, talent's not money in the bank, and you're both poor. Let's wait a little, a year and a half, or a year at least. If you get on all right, get a firm footing, Natasha shall be yours. If you don't, judge for yourself. You're an honest man, think it over. . . ."

And so we left it at that. And this is what happened a year later.

Yes, it was almost exactly a year later. One clear September day, towards evening, I came to my old friends, feeling ill, with trepidation in my heart, and sank almost fainting into a chair, so that they were even frightened as they looked at me. My head was spinning and anguish gripped my heart—I had had to make ten attempts before I could bring myself to walk into their house—but it was not because I had failed in my career and had acquired neither renown nor money; it was not because I was not yet an attaché and nowhere near being sent to Italy for my health, but because one may live through ten years in one year, and in that one year my Natasha too had lived through ten years. Infinity lay between us. And I remember I sat there before the old man, saying nothing, with unconscious fingers crushing the brim of my hat, which was crushed already; I sat, and I don't know why, waited

for Natasha to come in. My clothes were shabby and fitted me badly; I had grown thin, yellow and sunken in the face. And yet I did not look in the least like a poet, and there was still none of that grandeur in my eyes about which good Nikolai Sergeich had been so concerned a year ago. Anna Andreyevna looked at me with unfeigned and much too ready compassion, while to herself she was thinking:

"To think that this one was within an ace of being betrothed to Natasha. Lord have mercy on us and preserve us!"

"Won't you have some tea, Ivan Petrovich?" (The samovar was boiling on the table.) "How are you getting on?" she asked me. "You're quite ill, aren't you?" she said in a plaintive voice which I can hear even at this moment.

And I can see her as though it were yesterday; there she was talking to me, while her eyes betrayed another anxiety, the same anxiety which clouded the face of her old man, as he sat now brooding, while his tea grew cold. I knew that they were terribly worried at this moment over their lawsuit with Prince Valkovsky, which was not promising well for them, and that they had other new worries which had upset Nikolai Sergeich to the point of illness.

The young prince, about whom the whole trouble that led to the lawsuit had arisen, had found an opportunity of visiting the Ikhmenevs some five months before. The old man, who loved his dear Alyosha like a son, and spoke of him almost every day, welcomed him joyfully. Anna Andreyevna recalled Vasilyevskoye and wept. Alyosha began coming to see them more and more frequently without his father's knowledge. Nikolai Sergeich with his honesty, openness and uprightness indignantly disdained all precautions. His pride forbade his even considering what the prince would say if he knew that his son was received again in the house of the Ikhmenevs and despised all his

absurd suspicions. But the old man did not know whether he would have the strength to endure fresh insults. The young prince began to visit them almost daily. The old people enjoyed having him. He used to stay with them the whole evening, long after midnight. His father, of course, learnt everything eventually. What followed was quite disgusting. The prince sent Nikolai Sergeich a horrible, insulting letter, taking the same line as before, and peremptorily forbade his son to visit the Ikhmenevs. All this happened a fortnight before this call of mine. The old man grew terribly depressed. Was his Natasha, his innocent noble girl, to be mixed up in this dirty slander, this vileness again? She was insulted by the man who had already injured him before. And was all this to be left unavenged? For the first few days he took to his bed in despair. All that I knew. The story had reached me in every detail, though for the last three weeks I had been lying ill and despondent at my lodging and had not been to see them. But I knew besides.... No! I only had a presentiment then; I knew, but would not believe it, that, apart from these troubles, there was something which must be worrying them beyond anything in the world, and I watched them with torturing anguish. Yes, I was in agony; I was afraid to guess right, afraid to believe, and did all I could to put off the fatal moment. And yet that was why I had come. I felt drawn to them that evening.

"I say, Vanya," the old man asked, suddenly rousing himself, "you haven't been ill, have you? Why haven't you been here for so long? I owe you an apology. I've been meaning ever so long to call on you, but somehow it's all been ..." and he sank into brooding again.

"I haven't been well," I answered.

"Hm! Not well," he repeated, five minutes later. "I dare say not! I talked to you and warned you then, but you wouldn't heed me. Hm! No, Vanya, my boy, the muse

has lived hungry in a garret from time immemorial, and she'll go on so. That's how it is!"

Yes, the old man was out of sorts. If he had not been nursing a wound of his own in his heart, he would not have talked to me of the hungry muse. I looked intently at his face: it was sallow; there was a look of bewilderment in his eyes, some question which he was incapable of answering. He was abrupt and unusually testy. His wife glanced up at him uneasily now and again and shook her head. When he turned away she caught my eye and gave a meaningful nod in his direction.

"How is Natalya Nikolayevna? Is she at home?" I inquired of the anxious lady.

"She's at home, my dear man, she's at home," she answered, as though perturbed by my question. "She'll come in to see you directly. To think of it! Not a sight of you for three weeks! And she's become sort of ... there's no making her out at all: is she ill or is she well, bless her heart!" and she looked timidly at her husband.

"Why, there's nothing wrong with her," Nikolai Sergeich responded jerkily and reluctantly. "She's quite well. The girl's beginning to grow up, she's left off being a baby, that's all. Who can understand these maidenly moods and whims?"

"Whims, indeed!" Anna Andreyevna caught him up in an injured voice.

The old man said nothing and drummed on the table with his finger-tips.

"Good God, has there been something between them already?" I wondered in a panic.

"Well, how are things with you authors?" he began again. "Is B. still writing reviews?"

"Yes, he is," I answered.

"Oh, Vanya, Vanya," he ended up, with a wave of his hand. "What do reviews matter now?"

The door opened and Natasha walked in.

CHAPTER VII

She carried her hat in her hand and now laid it down on the piano; then she came up to me and held her hand out without speaking. Her lips moved slightly, as if she wanted to tell me something, some greeting, but she said nothing.

It was three weeks since we had seen each other. I looked at her in wonder and fear. How she had changed in those three weeks! Sadness wrung my heart as I perceived those pale, hollow cheeks, parched lips, and eyes that gleamed under their long dark lashes with a feverish fire and a sort of passionate determination.

But, my God, how beautiful she was! Never before, or since, have I seen her as she was on that fatal day. Could it be that this was the same Natasha, the same girl who only a year ago had listened to my novel with her eyes fixed on me and her lips following mine, who had laughed and joked with her father and me at supper afterwards, so gay and carefree; was it the same Natasha who there in that room had said "Yes" to me, with lowered head and blushing cheek?

We heard the deep note of the bell ringing for vespers. She started. The old lady crossed herself.

"You wanted to go to church, Natasha, and here they're already ringing for the service. Go, Natasha, go and pray, since it's so near, too. And you'll get some air at the same time. Why sit shut up indoors? See how pale you are, as though you were bewitched."

"Perhaps . . . I won't go . . . today," said Natasha slowly, in a low voice, almost a whisper. "I'm . . . not well," she added, and turned white as a sheet.

"You'd better go, Natasha, you wanted to just now and fetched your hat. Pray, Natasha, pray that God may give you good health," Anna Andreyevna persuaded her daugh-

ter, looking timidly at her, as though she were afraid of her.

"Yes, go, take a walk, too," the old man added, and he, too, looked anxiously at his daughter. "Mother is right. Here, Vanya will escort you."

It seemed to me a bitter smile touched Natasha's lips. She went to the piano, picked up her hat and put it on; her hands were trembling. All her movements seemed as it were unconscious, as though she did not know what she were doing. Her father and mother were looking at her intently.

"Good-bye," she said, hardly audibly.

"Now, my angel, why 'good-bye.' Is it so far away? A breath of fresh air will do you good; see how pale you are. Ah, I forgot (I seem to forget everything), I've finished an amulet for you; there's a prayer sewn into it, my angel; a nun from Kiev taught it to me last year; a very good prayer. I sewed it in just now. Put it on, Natasha. Maybe God will make you well. You are all we have."

And the mother took out Natasha's golden baptismal cross out of her work-basket; on the same ribbon was hung the amulet she had just finished.

"May it bring you health," she added, putting the ribbon round Natasha's neck and crossing her daughter. "There was a time when I used to bless you every night before you went to sleep, and said a prayer, and you repeated it after me. But now you're not the same, and God does not grant you a tranquil spirit. Oh, Natasha! Natasha! Your mother's prayers are no help to you either."

And the old woman began crying.

Natasha kissed her mother's hand without speaking, and took a step towards the door. But suddenly she turned quickly back and went up to her father. Her bosom heaved.

"Papa, bless ... bless your daughter, too," she brought out in a gasping voice, and sank on her knees before him.

We all stood embarrassed by this unexpected and too solemn action of hers. For a few seconds her father looked at her quite at a loss.

"Natasha, my little one, my girl, my darling, what is it?" he cried at last, and tears streamed from his eyes. "What is troubling you? Why are you crying day and night? I see it all, you know. I don't sleep at night, but stand and listen at your door. Tell me everything, Natasha, tell me all about it. I'm old, and we...."

He did not finish; he raised her up, and held her close. She pressed convulsively against his breast, and hid her face on his shoulder.

"It's nothing, nothing, it's only ... I'm not well ..." she kept repeating, choking with suppressed tears.

"May God bless you as I bless you, my darling child, my precious child!" said the father. "May He send you peace of heart for ever, and protect you from all evil. Pray to God, my love, that my sinful prayer may reach Him."

"And my blessing, my blessing, too, is upon you," added the mother, tears pouring down her face.

"Good-bye," whispered Natasha.

At the door she paused once more, took one more look at them, tried to say something but could not and went quickly out of the room. I rushed after her with a foreboding of evil.

CHAPTER VIII

She walked quickly, in silence, with her head down, without looking at me. But as she came out of the street on to the embankment she stopped short, and gripped my arm.

"I'm stifling," she whispered, "my heart aches so.... I'm stifling."

"Come back, Natasha," I cried in alarm.

"But, Vanya, don't you understand that I've gone away *for ever*, left them for ever, and shall never go back," she said, looking at me with inexpressible anguish.

My heart sank. I had foreseen all this even on my way to them that evening. I had pictured it all as through a mist, long before that day perhaps, yet now her words fell upon me like a thunderbolt.

We walked sadly along the embankment. I could not speak. I was thinking, trying to work it out in my mind, and became utterly lost. My head was in a whirl. It seemed so hideous, so impossible!

"Do you blame me, Vanya?" she said at last.

"No . . . but . . . but I can't believe it; it cannot be!" I answered, not knowing what I was saying.

"Yes, Vanya, it already is! I have gone away from them and I don't know what will become of them . . . or what will become of me!"

"You're going to *him*, Natasha? Yes?"

"Yes," she answered.

"But that's impossible!" I cried frantically. "Don't you understand that it's impossible, Natasha, my poor girl! Why, it's madness. You'll kill them, and ruin yourself! Do you understand that, Natasha?"

"I know; but what am I to do? I can't help it," she said; and her words held such anguish as though she were going towards the scaffold.

"Come back, come back, before it's too late," I besought her; and the more warmly, the more emphatically I implored her, the more I realized the uselessness of my entreaties, and the absurdity of them at that moment.

"Do you understand, Natasha, what you are doing to your father? Have you thought of that? You know his father is your father's enemy. You know, the prince has insulted your father, has accused him of stealing money; he called him a thief. You know why they've gone to law with one another. Good heavens! and that's the least

important thing. But do you know, Natasha (Oh, God, of course you know it all!) . . . do you know that the prince suspected your father and mother of trying to arrange a love affair between you when Alyosha was staying in the country with you? Think a minute, just imagine what your father went through then owing to that slander; why, his hair has turned grey in these two years! Look at him! And the main thing is—oh, good heavens!—you know all this, Natasha. I'll say nothing of what it will mean to them to lose you for ever. Why, you're their treasure, all that is left them in their old age. I don't even want to speak of that, you must know it for yourself. Remember that your father thinks you have been slandered without cause, insulted by these snobs, unavenged! And now, at this very time, it's all flared up again, all this old rankling enmity has grown more bitter than ever, because Alyosha was received in your house. The prince has insulted your father again. The old man's anger is still hot at this fresh affront, and now suddenly all this, all these accusations will turn out to be true! Everyone who knows about it will justify the prince now, and throw the blame on you and your father. Why, what will become of him now? It will kill him outright! Shame, disgrace, and through whom? Through you, his daughter, his one precious child! And your mother? Why, she won't outlive your old father, you know. Natasha, Natasha! What are you doing? Turn back! Come to your senses!"

She did not speak. At last she glanced at me reproachfully, it seemed, and there was such piercing anguish, such suffering in her eyes that I understood how painfully her wounded heart was bleeding without the added hurt my words inflicted. I saw what her decision was costing her, and how I was torturing her, lacerating her with my useless words that came too late. I saw all that, and yet I could not restrain myself and went on speaking.

"Why, you said yourself just now to Anna Andreyevna that perhaps you would not go out . . . to the service. So you meant to stay; so you were not quite decided?"

She only smiled bitterly in reply. And why did I ask her that? I might have understood that all was irrevocably settled. But I was beside myself, too.

"Can you have grown to love him so much?" I cried, looking at her with a sinking heart, scarcely knowing what I was asking.

"What can I say to you, Vanya? You see, he told me to come, and here I am waiting for him," she said with the same bitter smile.

"But listen, just listen," I began imploring her again, clutching at a straw; "all this can still be remedied, arranged differently, in quite a different sort of way. You need not go away from home. I'll tell you what to do, Natasha. I'll undertake to arrange it all for you, meetings, and everything. Only don't leave home. I will carry your letters; why not? It would be better than what you're doing now. I'll manage it; you'll both be pleased. You'll see. And then you won't ruin yourself, Natasha, dear, as you're doing. . . . You know you'll ruin yourself hopelessly this way, hopelessly. Please agree, Natasha, and everything will go well and happily, and you can love each other as much as you like. And when your fathers have left off quarrelling (for they're bound to leave off some day)—then. . . ."

"Enough, Vanya, stop please!" she interrupted, pressing my hand tightly, and smiling through her tears. "Dear, kind Vanya! You're a good, honourable man! And not one word of yourself! I was the one to desert you, and yet you've forgiven everything; you think of nothing but my happiness. You are ready to carry letters for us."

She began to cry.

"I know how you loved me, Vanya, and how you love me still, and you've never reproached me with one bitter

word all this time, while I, I . . . my God! how great the wrong I've done you. Do you remember, Vanya, do you remember the time we spent together? It would have been better if I'd never met him; never seen him! I could have lived with you, with you, good, kind Vanya, my dear one. No, I'm not worthy of you! You see what I am; reminding you of our past happiness at a moment like this, when you're wretched enough as it is! Here you've not been to see us for three weeks: I swear to you, Vanya, the thought never once entered my head that you hated me and had cursed me. I knew why you were staying away! You did not want to be in our way, and to be a living reproach to us. And wasn't it painful for you to see us too? And how I've missed you, Vanya, how I've missed you! Vanya, listen, if I do love Alyosha madly, insanely, yet perhaps I love you even more as my friend. I feel, I know that I couldn't go on living without you. I need you. I need your soul, your heart of gold. . . . Oh, Vanya, what a bitter, a terrible time is before us!"

She burst into a flood of tears. She was indeed suffering terribly!

"Oh, how I have been longing to see you," she went on, fighting back her tears. "How thin you've grown, how ill and pale you look. Have you really been ill, Vanya? And I haven't even asked! I keep talking of myself. How are you getting on with the reviewers now? What about your new novel? Is it going well?"

"Can we be bothered with me and my novels, now, Natasha! As if my affairs mattered! They're all right. But tell me this, Natasha, was it he who demanded that you should go to him?"

"No, not only he, it was more I. He did say so certainly, but I too. . . . You see, dear, I'll tell you everything; they're making a match for him with a girl who's rich and very highly placed, related to very grand people. His father absolutely insists on his marrying her, and his

father, as you know, is an awful schemer; he's set every spring working; and it's a chance that wouldn't come again in ten years. . . . Connections, money . . . and they say she's very pretty, and she has education, and a good heart, everything's good about her; Alyosha's attracted by her already. What's more, his father's very anxious to get him settled down, so that he could get married himself, and so he's determined to break it off between us. He's afraid of me and my influence on Alyosha."

"But do you mean to say that the prince knows of your love?" I interrupted in surprise. "He only suspected it, didn't he, and just vaguely, too?"

"He knows. He knows all about it."

"Why, who told him?"

"Alyosha told him everything a little while ago. He told me himself that he had."

"Good God, but what is going on! He told him everything and at such a time too!"

"Don't blame him, Vanya," Natasha broke in; "don't jeer at him. He can't be judged like other people. Be fair. He's not like you and me for instance. He's a child: he's been brought up like that. Does he realize what he's doing? The first impression, the influence of the first person he meets can turn him away from what he has been swearing allegiance to a minute before. He has no strength of character. He'll vow to be true to you, and that very day he will just as truthfully, just as sincerely, devote himself to someone else; and what's more, he'll come and tell you about it himself. He may even do something bad; but yet one can't blame him for it, and can only feel sorry for him. He's even capable of self-sacrifice, and if you knew what sacrifice! But only till the next new impression, then he'll forget it all. *So he'll forget me if I'm not continually with him.* That's what he's like."

"But Natasha, perhaps that's all not true, perhaps it's only gossip. How can a mere boy like that get married!"

"I tell you his father has some considerations of his own."

"But how do you know that this young lady is so charming, and that he is already attracted by her?"

"Why, he told me so himself."

"What! Told you himself that he might love another woman, and demands this sacrifice from you now?"

"No, Vanya, no. You don't know him, you've not been much with him; you must know him better before you judge of him. There isn't a truer and purer heart than his in the world. Why, would it be better if he were to lie? And as for his being attracted by her, why, if he didn't see me for a week he'd forget me, fall in love with someone else and then when he saw me he'd be at my feet again. No! It's a good thing that I know it, that it's not concealed from me, or else I should be dying of suspicion. Yes, Vanya! I have come to the conclusion: *if I'm not always with him continually, every minute, he will cease to love me, forget me, and throw me over.* He's like that; he's liable to be captivated by any woman. And then what should I do? I should die . . . die indeed! I should be glad to die now. But what will it be for me to live without him? That would be worse than death itself, worse than any agony! Oh, Vanya, Vanya! It does mean something that I've abandoned my father and mother for him! Don't try and persuade me, everything's decided! He must be near me every hour, every minute. I can't go back. I know that I am ruined and that I'm ruining others . . . oh, Vanya!" she cried suddenly and began trembling all over; "what if he doesn't love me any more! What if it's true what you said of him just now" (I had never said it), "that he's only deceiving me, that he only appears to be so truthful and sincere, and is really wicked and vain! I'm defending him to you now,

and perhaps this very minute he's with another woman and is laughing to himself . . . and I, I'm so despicable that I've thrown up everything and am walking about the streets looking for him. . . . Oh, Vanya!"

This moan broke with such anguish from her heart that my whole soul was wrung with grief. I realized that Natasha had lost all control of herself. Only a blind, insane jealousy could have brought her to this fantastic resolution. But jealousy flamed up in my heart, too, and suddenly burst out. I could not restrain myself: this ugly emotion drew me on.

"Natasha," I said, "there's only one thing I don't understand. How can you love him after what you've just said about him yourself? You don't respect him, you don't even believe in his love, and yet you're going to him irrevocably and are ruining everyone for his sake. What's the meaning of it? He'll make you suffer enough to last you a lifetime, and you'll torment him too. You love him too much, Natasha, too much! I cannot understand such love!"

"Yes, I love him insanelly," she answered, paling as from pain. "I never loved you like that, Vanya. I know I've gone out of my mind, and that my love for him is all wrong. It's bad, the way I love him. . . . Listen, Vanya, I knew it before, and even in our happiest moments I felt that he would bring me nothing but torture. But what am I to do if even torture from him is happiness to me now? Do you suppose I'm going to him to meet joy? Do you suppose I don't know beforehand what's in store for me, or what I shall have to bear from him? Why, he's sworn to love me, made all sorts of promises; but I don't trust one of his promises. I don't set any value on them, and I never have, though I knew he wasn't lying to me, and was incapable of lying. I told him myself, myself, that I don't want to bind him in any way. That's a better way with him; no one likes to be tied down. I least

of all. And yet I'm glad to be his slave, his willing slave; to put up with anything from him, anything, so long as he is with me, so long as I can look at him! I think I'd even let him love another woman if only I were there, if only I might be near. Isn't it despicable, Vanya?" she asked, suddenly looking at me with a feverish, haggard look. For one instant it seemed to me she was delirious. "Such desires are despicable, aren't they? What if they are? I say that it is base myself. Yet if he were to abandon me I should run after him to the ends of the earth, even if he were to repulse me, even if he were to drive me away. Here you are trying to persuade me to go back—but what would come of it? If I went back I should come away tomorrow; he would tell me to and I should come; he would call, would whistle to me as he might to a dog, and I should run to him. . . . Torture! I don't shrink from any torture from him! I should know it, was at *his* hands I was suffering! Oh, this cannot be explained, Vanya!"

"And her father and mother?" I thought. She seemed to have already forgotten them.

"Then he's not even going to marry you, Natasha?"

"Oh, he's promised to. He's promised everything. That's why he's sent for me now, to be married tomorrow, secretly, out of town, but, of course, he doesn't know what he's doing. Very likely he doesn't even know how one goes about arranging a wedding. And what sort of a husband will he make! It's absurd really. And if he does marry me he'll be miserable, he'll begin to reproach me. . . . I don't want him to reproach me with anything, ever. I'll give up everything for him, and let him do nothing for me! Why, if marriage would make him unhappy, why make him unhappy then?"

"No, but this is madness, Natasha," said I. "Well, are you going straight to him now?"

"No, he promised to come here to fetch me. We agreed...."

And she looked eagerly into the distance, but there was no one in sight yet.

"And he's not here yet. And you've come *first!*" I cried with indignation. Natasha staggered as though from a blow. Her face worked convulsively.

"He may not come at all," she said with a bitter smile. "The day before yesterday he wrote that if I didn't give him my word that I'd come, he would be obliged to put off his plan—of going away and marrying me; and his father would take him to call on his bride-to-be. And he wrote it so simply, so naturally, as if it were nothing at all.... What if he really has gone to *her*, Vanya?"

I did not answer. She crushed my hand, and her eyes glittered.

"He is with her," she brought out, scarcely audibly.

"He hoped I would not come here, so that he might go to her, and say afterwards that it was my fault, that he had warned me beforehand, and I had failed to come myself. He's tired of me, so he's growing colder. Oh, my God! I'm mad! Why, he told me himself last time that he was tired of me. What am I waiting for then?"

"Here he is," I cried, suddenly catching sight of him on the embankment in the distance.

Natasha started, gasped, peered intently at Alyosha's approaching figure, then, suddenly dropping my hand, flew towards him. He, too, quickened his pace, and in a minute she was in his arms.

There was scarcely anyone in the street but ourselves. They kissed each other, laughed; Natasha laughed and cried both together, as though they were meeting after an endless separation. The colour rushed into her pale cheeks. She was like one possessed. Alyosha noticed me and at once came up to me.

CHAPTER IX

I studied him avidly, although I had seen him many times before that minute. I looked into his eyes, as though their expression might explain all that bewildered me, might explain to me how this boy could have bewitched her, could have aroused in her a love so insane—a love that made her forget her very first duty, and recklessly sacrifice all that had been most sacred to her. The prince took both my hands and pressed them warmly, and the look in his eyes, gentle and candid, penetrated to my heart.

I felt that I might be mistaken in my conclusions about him if only because he was my enemy. No, I did not like him; and I admit I never could grow to like him and was perhaps alone in this among all those who knew him. I could not get over my dislike of many things in him, even of his elegant appearance, perhaps, indeed, because it was too elegant somehow. Afterwards I realized that in this respect as well my judgement had been prejudiced. He was tall, slender and graceful; his face was oblong and always pale; he had fair hair, large, soft, dreamy, blue eyes, in which there were occasional flashes of the most spontaneous, childish gaiety. The full crimson lips of his small, exquisitely modelled mouth almost always had a grave expression, and this gave a peculiarly unexpected and fascinating charm to the smile which suddenly appeared on them, and was so naive and ingenuous that, whatever mood you were in, you felt you simply had to respond to it with a similar smile at once. He dressed not over fashionably, but always elegantly; it was evident that this elegance cost him no effort whatever, that it was innate in him.

It is true that he had some bad traits in him too, some of the disagreeable habits characteristic of aristocratic society; frivolity, self-complacency, and polite insolence. But he was so candid and simple at heart that he was

the first to blame himself for these defects, to confess them and laugh at them. I fancy that this boy could never have told a lie even in jest, or if he did I'm sure he would have had no suspicion of its being wrong. Even egoism itself was rather attractive in him, perhaps just because it was open and not concealed. There was nothing reserved about him. He was weak, trusting, and faint-hearted; he had no will whatever. To deceive or injure him would have been as sinful and cruel as deceiving and injuring a child. He was naive for his years and had scarcely any notion of real life; though, indeed, I believe he would have had none at forty either. Men like him are, so to say, condemned to eternal adolescence. I think there is no one who could help getting to love him: he would have cuddled up to you like a child. Natasha had spoken truly; he might have been guilty of an evil action if driven to it by some strong influence, but if he had realized the result of the action afterwards, I believe he would have died of regret. Natasha instinctively felt that she would rule and command him, that he would even be her victim. She anticipated the ecstasy of loving passionately and torturing the one she loved simply because she loved him, and that was why, perhaps, she was anxious to let herself be his victim first. But love was shining in his eyes, too, and he gazed at her with rapture. She looked at me triumphantly. At that instant she forgot everything—her parents, her parting with them and her suspicions. She was happy.

"Vanya!" she cried. "I've been unfair to him and I'm not worthy of him. I thought you weren't coming, Alyosha. Forget my evil thoughts, Vanya! I'll atone for them!" she added, looking at him with infinite love. He smiled, kissed her hand, and still keeping his hold of her hand turned to me, and said:

"Don't blame me either. I've been wanting to embrace you as a brother for ever so long; she has told me so

much about you! We've hardly got to know each other and have somehow not made friends till now. Let us be friends, and . . . forgive us," he added, flushing slightly and speaking in an undertone, but with such a charming smile that I could not help responding to his words with my whole heart.

"Yes, yes, Alyosha," Natasha took up, "he's on our side, he's a brother to us, he has forgiven us already, and without him we shall not be happy. I've told you already. Oh, we're cruel children, Alyosha! But we will live all three together. . . . Vanya!" she went on, and her lips began to quiver. "You'll go back home to *them* now. You have a heart of gold, and even if they don't forgive me, yet when they see that you've forgiven me it may soften them a little towards me, perhaps. Tell them everything, everything, in your own words, from your heart; find the right words. Stand up for me, save me. Explain to them all the reasons as you have understood them. You know, Vanya, I might not have dared do this, if you hadn't happened to be with me today! You are my salvation. I rested all my hopes on you at once, for I felt that you would know how to tell them, so that at least the first horror of it would be easier for them. Oh, my God, my God! . . . Tell them from me, Vanya, that I know I can never be forgiven now; if they forgive me, God won't! But even if they curse me I shall always bless them and pray for them to the end of my life. My whole heart is with them! Oh, why can't we all be happy! Why, why! . . . My God, what have I done!" she cried out suddenly, as though coming to her senses, and trembling all over with horror, she hid her face in her hands. Alyosha put his arm round her and held her close to him without speaking. Several minutes of silence followed.

"And you could demand such a sacrifice?" I cried, looking at him reproachfully.

"Don't blame me," he repeated, "I assure you that all this misery, terrible as it is, is only for the moment. I'm perfectly certain of it. All we need is courage to bear this moment; she said the very same to me herself. It's family pride, these quite unnecessary quarrels, some sort of stupid lawsuits! That's the cause of it all, you know. But (I've given it much thought, I assure you) ... all this must cease. We shall all be united again; and then we shall be perfectly happy, so much so that even the old people will make it up, looking at us. Who knows, perhaps our marriage will be just the thing to start them on their way to a reconciliation. I think it's bound to be so, in fact. What do you think?"

"You said: 'marriage.' When is the wedding to be?" I said, glancing at Natasha.

"Tomorrow or the day after. At least the day after tomorrow—that's certain. I am not quite clear about it myself yet, you see; and, to tell the truth, I've not made any arrangements yet. I thought perhaps Natasha wouldn't be coming today. Besides, my father insisted on taking me to see my betrothed today. (You know they're making a match for me; has Natasha told you? But I don't want it.) So you see I couldn't make any definite arrangements. But anyway we shall probably be married the day after tomorrow. I think so, at least, for I don't see how else it can be. Tomorrow we'll set off for a place on the road to Pskov. I've a school-friend there, a very nice fellow; it's not far off, you must meet him some day. There's a priest in the village there too; though actually, I don't know whether there is or not. I ought to have made inquiries, but I've not had time. But all that's mere trifles, really. What matters is to keep the chief thing in view. One might get a priest from some neighbouring village or other, don't you think? There must be neighbouring villages there, surely! It's a pity, though, that I haven't had time to write them a line;

I ought to have warned them we were coming. My friend's probably not at home now. But that's the least of our worries. So long as there's determination everything will come right of itself, won't it? And meanwhile, till tomorrow or the day after, she will stay here with me. I have taken a separate flat where we shall live when we come back, too. I won't go back to my father's house, will I? You'll come and see us; I've made it so nice. My school-friends will come and see me. I'll arrange evenings. . . ."

I looked at him in perplexity and distress. Natasha's eyes besought me to be kinder and not to judge him harshly. She listened to his talk with a melancholy sort of smile, and at the same time she seemed to be looking at him lovingly as one looks at a sweet, merry child, listening to its idle but charming prattle. I looked at her reproachfully. I felt unbearably miserable.

"But your father?" I asked. "Are you so perfectly certain he'll forgive you?"

"He must," he replied. "What else can he do? I mean, of course, he'll disown and curse me at first; in fact, I'm sure he will. He's like that; and so strict with me. He may even take some proceedings against me; have recourse to his parental authority, so to speak. But that's not serious, you know. He loves me to distraction; he'll be angry for a while and then forgive us. And then everyone will be reconciled, and we shall all be happy. Her father, too."

"And what if he doesn't forgive you? Have you thought of that?"

"He's sure to forgive us, though perhaps not so soon. So what matter? I'll prove to him that I have character. He's always scolding me for not having character, for being feather-brained. He shall see now whether I'm feather-brained or not. It's no joke to become a married man, is it. . . . I'll no longer be a boy then . . . I mean I shall be just like other people . . . that is, other married

men. I shall live by my own work. Natasha says that's ever so much better than living at other people's expense, as we all do. If you only knew what a lot of fine things she tells me! I should never have thought of it myself—I've been brought up, taught differently. It's true, I know it myself, that I'm frivolous and scarcely fit for anything; but do you know, a wonderful idea occurred to me the day before yesterday. I'll tell you now though it's hardly the moment, for Natasha, too, must hear, and you'll give us your advice. You see: I want to write stories and sell them to the magazines just like you do. You'll help me with the editors, won't you? I've been counting on you, and I lay awake all last night thinking up a novel, just as an experiment, and do you know, it might turn out quite a charming little thing. I took the subject from a comedy of Scribe's. . . . But I'll tell you of it afterwards. The great thing is they will pay for it. They do pay you, don't they?"

I could not help smiling.

"You laugh," he said, smiling in response. "But, I say," he added with incredible simplicity, "don't think I'm quite as hopeless as I seem. I'm really awfully observant, you'll see for yourself. Why shouldn't I try? It might come to something. But I dare say you're right; of course I know nothing of real life; that's what Natasha says too; and indeed everyone says so; what sort of a writer would I make? You may laugh, of course, but correct me; you'll be doing it for her sake, and you love her. I'll tell you in all honesty. I'm not good enough for her; I feel that; it grieves me terribly, and I don't know what has made her love me so! And I, I'd give my life for her. Truly, I had no fear at all until this minute, but now I feel frightened: what is it we're doing? Heavens, is it possible that a man who's absolutely set upon his duty shouldn't have sufficient brains and courage to do it? At least you must help us, you're our friend! You're

the only friend left us. For what do I know alone? Forgive me for counting on you like this. I consider you a most noble man, and a much better one than I am. But I shall improve, believe me, and be worthy of you both."

At this point he shook my hand again, and his fine eyes were full of warm and sincere feeling. He had held out his hand to me so trustingly, he had such faith in my being his friend.

"She will help me to improve," he went on. "But don't be too apprehensive, don't be too grieved about us. I have great hopes, in spite of everything, and financially we'll be perfectly secure. If my novel doesn't succeed—to tell the truth I thought even this morning that the novel is a silly idea, and I only talked about it now to hear your opinion—I could, if the worst came to the worst, give music lessons. You didn't know I was good at music? I'm not ashamed to live by work like that. My ideas are quite advanced on this score. Besides I've a lot of valuable knick-knacks, things for my dressing-table; what do we want with them? I'll sell them, and you know we can live for ever so long on that! And then if the worst really comes to the worst, I may even take a post in some department. My father would really be glad. He's always urging me to go into the service, but I keep putting him off saying I'm not well. (But I believe my name is put down for something already.) But now when he sees that marriage has done me good, and made me steady, and that I have really gone into the service, he'll be delighted and forgive me."

"But, Alexei Petrovich, have you thought what a terrible to-do there'll be now between your father and hers? What will it be like in her home this evening, do you suppose?"

And I motioned towards Natasha, who had turned deathly pale at my words. I was merciless.

"Yes, yes, you're right, it's awful!" he answered. "I've thought about it already and grieved over it. But what

can we do? You're right; if only her parents at least would forgive us! And how I love them—if you only knew! They've been like a father and mother to me, and this is how I repay them! Oh, these quarrels, these lawsuits! You can't imagine how unpleasant all that is for us now. And what are they quarrelling about! We all love one another so, and yet we're quarrelling. If only they'd make up and put an end to it! That's what I'd do in their place, really I would. . . . I feel frightened at what you say. Natasha, it's horrible what we're doing, you and I! I said that before. You insisted on it yourself. But listen, Ivan Petrovich, perhaps it will all be for the best, don't you think? They will be reconciled in the end, won't they? We shall help them to make it up. That is so, there's no doubt of it. They won't be able to hold out against our love. . . . Let them curse us; we shall love them all the same, and they will give in. You don't know how kind-hearted my father is sometimes. He only has a way of glaring at you, but at other times he's most reasonable. If you only knew how gently he talked to me today, persuading me! And I'm going against him the very same day—it makes me very sad. It's all these stupid prejudices! It's perfect madness! Why, if he were to take a good look at her, and spend only half an hour with her, he would agree to everything at once." Saying this Alyosha looked tenderly and passionately at Natasha.

"I've fancied a thousand times with delight," he went on babbling, "how he will love her as soon as he gets to know her, and how she'll astonish everyone. Why, they've never seen a girl like her! My father is convinced that she is simply a schemer. It's my duty to vindicate her honour, and I shall do it. Ah, Natasha, everyone will come to love you, everyone. Nobody could help loving you," he added rapturously. "Though I'm not nearly good enough for you, still you must love me, Natasha, and I . . . you know me! And do we need much to make us happy! Yes, I do

believe that this evening is bound to bring us all happiness, peace and harmony! Blessed be this evening! Isn't it so, Natasha? But what's the matter? Good God! What is the matter?"

She was pale as death. All the while Alyosha rambled on she was looking intently at him, but her eyes grew dimmer and more fixed, and her face turned whiter and whiter. I fancied she had sunk into a stupor, and did not hear him at the end. Alyosha's exclamation seemed to rouse her. She came to herself, looked round her, and suddenly rushed to me. Quickly, as though in haste and anxious to hide it from Alyosha, she took a letter out of her pocket and gave it to me. It was a letter to her father and mother, and had been written the day before. As she gave it to me she looked intently at me as though she could not take her eyes off me. There was a look of utter despair in them; I shall never forget that dreadful look. I was overcome by terror, too. I saw that only now she realized all the horror of what she was doing. She struggled to say something, began to speak, and suddenly fell fainting. I was just in time to catch her. Alyosha turned pale with alarm; he rubbed her temples, kissed her hands and her lips. In two minutes she came to herself. The cab in which Alyosha had come was standing not far off; he called it. When she was in the cab Natasha clutched my hand frantically, and a hot tear scalded my fingers. The cab started. I stood a long while watching it. All my happiness was shattered at that moment, and my life was broken in two. I felt that poignantly. . . . I walked slowly back to the Ikhmenevs. I did not know what I should say to them, how I should go in to them. My thoughts were numb; my legs were giving way beneath me.

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And that is the whole story of my happiness; this was the end and conclusion of my love. I will now take up my story where I left it.

CHAPTER X

Some five days after Smith's death, I moved into his lodging. All that day I felt insufferably sad. The weather was cold and overcast; wet snow kept falling, interspersed with rain. Only towards evening the sun peeped out for an instant, and a stray sunbeam glanced into my room as well—from curiosity probably. I had begun to regret having moved here. Though the room was large it was so low-pitched, so begrimed with soot, so musty, and so unpleasantly empty in spite of the furniture I had. I thought then that in that room I should certainly ruin what health I had left. And so I did.

All that morning I had been busy with my papers, sorting and arranging them. For want of a portfolio I had packed them in a pillow-case. They were all crumpled and mixed up. Then I sat down to write. I was still working at my big novel then; but I could not settle down to it. My mind was full of other things.

I threw down my pen and sat by the window. Twilight was deepening and I felt more and more melancholy. Various depressing thoughts beset me. I kept thinking that in the end I should die in Petersburg. Spring was at hand; and I thought, if only I could get out of this shell into the light of day, breathe the freshness of the fields and woods, I certainly would come back to life again. It was so long since I had seen them! I remember, too, it came into my mind how good it would be if by some magic, some miracle, I could forget everything that had happened in the last few years; forget everything entirely, refresh my mind, and begin again with new energy. In those days I still dreamed of that and hoped for a rebirth. "Perhaps I'd better go into an asylum, or something," I thought at last, "to have my brains shaken up in my head and rearranged anew, and then be cured again." So I still had a thirst for life and a faith in it. But I remember

that it made me laugh. "What should I have to do after the madhouse? Write novels again?"

So I brooded despondently, and meanwhile time was passing. Night was coming on. I was due at Natasha's that evening, she had earnestly begged me to come in a note she had sent me the day before. I jumped up and began getting ready. As it was I was anxious to get away from my room, even if it was out into the rain and the slush.

As it got darker my room seemed to grow larger and larger, as though the walls were retreating. I suddenly fancied that every night now I should be seeing Smith in every corner of the room; he would sit there and stare at me as he had stared at Adam Ivanich, in the shop, and Azorka would lie at his feet. And at that very instant I had an experience which made a great impression upon me.

However, I ought to make a frank confession: either owing to the derangement of my nerves, or to the new impressions in my new lodgings, or to my recent melancholy, as soon as twilight fell I gradually sank into that condition which now comes over me so often at night in my illness, and which I call my *mystical horror*. It is a most oppressive, agonizing state of terror of something which I don't know how to define, of something which passes all understanding and is outside the natural order of things, which yet is certain to take shape this very minute perhaps, and as though in mockery of all the arguments of reason, come to me and stand before me as an undeniable fact, hideous, ghastly, and relentless. This fear usually grows stronger and stronger, in spite of all the protests of reason, so much so that although the mind perhaps develops even greater clarity at such moments, it nevertheless loses all power of resistance to these sensations. The mind is unheeded, it becomes useless, and this inward division intensifies the shrinking agony of

suspense. I imagine it is something like the agony of people who are afraid of the dead. But in my distress the indefiniteness of the apprehension makes my suffering even more acute.

I remember I was standing with my back to the door and taking my hat from the table, when suddenly at that very instant the thought struck me that when I turned round I should inevitably see Smith; at first he would softly open the door, stand in the doorway and look round the room, then he would come towards me slowly, with drooping head, would stand facing me, fix his lustreless eyes upon me and suddenly laugh in my face, a long, toothless, noiseless laugh, and his whole body would shake with laughter and go on shaking a long time. The picture suddenly stood with extraordinary vividness and distinctness before my mind's eye, and at the same time I was suddenly seized by the fullest, the most absolute conviction that all this would infallibly, inevitably come to pass; that it was already happening, only I could not see it because I was standing with my back to the door, and that just at that very instant, perhaps, the door was opening already. I looked round quickly, and—the door *was* opening, softly, noiselessly, just as I had imagined it a minute before. I cried out. For a long time no one appeared, as though the door had opened of itself; suddenly a strange being appeared in the doorway; somebody's eyes, as far as I could make out in the dark, were scrutinizing me steadily and intently. A shiver ran over all my limbs. To my intense horror I saw that it was a child, a little girl, and even if it had been Smith himself he would not have frightened me as much perhaps as this strange and unexpected apparition of an unknown child in my room at such an hour and at such a moment.

I have mentioned already that the child had opened the door as slowly and noiselessly as though she were afraid to come in. When she finally opened it she stood in the

doorway and gazed at me in astonishment which bordered on stupefaction. At last softly and slowly she advanced two steps into the room and stopped before me, still without uttering a word. I looked at her more closely. She was a girl of twelve or thirteen, short, thin, and as pale as though she had just recovered from some terrible illness, and this pallor emphasized the brilliance of her great, black eyes. With her left hand she held together a tattered old shawl, and with it covered her chest, which was still shivering with the chill of evening. Her clothes might well be described as rags and tatters. Her thick black hair was rumpled and uncombed. We stood so for a minute or two, staring at one another.

"Where's Grandfather?" she asked at last in a husky, hardly audible voice, as if she had a sore throat or chest.

All my mystical horror was dispelled at this question. It was an inquiry for Smith; traces of him were unexpectedly showing up.

"Your grandfather? But he's dead!" I said suddenly, unprepared for her question, and I immediately regretted my abruptness. For a minute she stood still in the same position, then suddenly she began to tremble all over, so violently it seemed she was about to be seized with a dangerous, nervous fit. I supported her so that she should not fall. In a few minutes she was better, and I could see quite clearly that she was making a supreme effort to control her emotion before me.

"Forgive me, forgive me, little girl! Forgive me, my child!" I said. "I told you so abruptly, and perhaps it's a mistake . . . poor little thing! Who is it you're looking for? The old man who lived here?"

"Yes," she whispered with an effort, looking anxiously at me.

"His name was Smith? Was it?" I asked.

"Y-yes!"

"Then he . . . yes, then it was he. . . . Only don't grieve,

my dear. Why haven't you been here before? Where have you come from now? He was buried yesterday; he died suddenly.... So you're his granddaughter, are you?"

The girl made no answer to my rapid and incoherent questions. She turned in silence and quietly walked out of the room. I was so astonished that I did not try to stop her or question her further. She paused in the doorway, and, half-turning, asked me: "Azorka is dead too, is he?"

"Yes, Azorka's dead, too," I answered, and her question seemed queer to me, as if she had felt sure that Azorka must certainly have died with the old man.

Hearing my answer the girl went noiselessly out of the room and carefully closed the door behind her.

A minute later I ran out after her, horribly vexed with myself for having let her go. She went out so quietly that I did not hear her open the outer door on to the stairs.

"She could not have gone down the stairs yet," I thought, and I stood listening. But all was still, and there was no sound of footsteps. I only heard the slamming of a door on the ground floor, and then all was quiet again.

I hurried down the stairs. The staircase from my flat on the fifth storey down to the fourth was a spiral one, from the fourth downwards it was an ordinary straight one. It was a black, dirty staircase, always dark, such as one commonly finds in large houses let out in small flats. By that time the staircase had grown quite dark. Groping my way down to the fourth storey I stood still, and I suddenly felt something prompting me that there was someone in the passage here, hiding from me. I began to feel about with my hands. The girl was there, right in the corner, and with her face turned to the wall was crying softly and inaudibly.

"I say, what are you afraid of?" I began. "I frightened you so, it's my fault. Your grandfather spoke of you when he was dying; his last words were of you.... I've got some

books left by him, they're probably yours. What's your name? Where do you live? He spoke of Sixth Street...."

But I did not finish. She uttered a cry of terror as though alarmed at my knowing where she lived; pushed me away with her thin, bony hand, and fled down the stairs. I followed her; I could still hear her footsteps below. Suddenly they ceased. When I ran out into the street she was already gone. When I came as far as Voznesensky Prospekt I saw that all my efforts were in vain. She had vanished. "Most likely she hid from me somewhere," I thought, "on her way downstairs."

CHAPTER XI

But I had hardly stepped out on the muddy wet pavement of the prospekt when I ran against a passer-by, who was hastening somewhere with his head down, apparently lost in thought. To my great surprise I recognized my old friend Ikhmenev. It was an evening of unexpected meetings for me. I knew that the old man had been taken badly ill three days ago; and here I was meeting him in the street in such wet weather. Moreover it had never been his habit to go out in the evening, and since Natasha had gone away, that is, for the last six months, he had become a regular stay-at-home. His delight in seeing me was not quite ordinary somehow, like that of a man who has at last found a friend with whom he can share his thoughts. He seized my hand, pressed it warmly, and without asking where I was going, drew me along with him. He was upset about something, jerky and hurried in his manner. "Where had he been?" I wondered. It would have been a mistake to question him. He had become terribly suspicious, and sometimes detected an offensive hint, an insult in the simplest inquiry or remark.

I looked at him stealthily. His face showed signs of illness; he had grown much thinner of late; his chin showed a week's growth of beard; his hair, which had turned quite grey, hung down in disorder from under his crushed hat, and lay in long straggling wisps on the collar of his shabby old greatcoat. I had noticed before that there were moments when he seemed to grow forgetful; for instance, he would forget that he was not alone in the room, and would talk to himself, gesticulating with his hands. It was painful to look at him.

"Well, Vanya, well?" he began. "Where were you going? I've come out, my boy; business, you know. You're well, I hope?"

"But how are you?" I said. "You were ill only the other day, and here you are, out."

The old man seemed not to hear me and made no answer.

"How is Anna Andreyevna?"

"She's well, she's well. . . . Or rather, she's slightly ill too. She's feeling depressed sort of . . . she was speaking of you, wondering why you hadn't been for so long. Were you coming to see us now, Vanya, or not? Maybe I'm delaying you, keeping you back from something?" he asked suddenly, peering at me distrustfully and suspiciously.

The sensitive old man had become so touchy and irritable that had I answered him now that I was not on my way to see them, he would certainly have been wounded, and have parted from me coldly. I hastened to reply in the affirmative, and to assure him that I was on my way to look in on Anna Andreyevna. I said it though I knew I would be late, and might not have time to see Natasha at all.

"Well, that's good," said the old man, completely pacified by my answer, "that's good." And he suddenly relapsed into silence and paused, as if he had left something unsaid.

"Yes, that's good," he repeated absently, five minutes later, as though coming to himself after a long reverie. "Hm! You know, Vanya, you've always been like a son to us. God has not blessed us . . . with a son, but He has sent us you. That's what I've always thought. And my old woman, too . . . yes! And you've always been affectionate and respectful to us, like a grateful son. May God bless you for it, Vanya, as we two old people bless and love you. . . . Yes!"

His voice quavered. He paused a moment.

"Well . . . well? You haven't been ill, have you? Why have you not been to see us for so long?"

I told him the whole incident of Smith, apologizing for having let Smith's affairs keep me, telling him that I had almost fallen ill besides, and that with all this on my hands it was a long way to go to Vasilyevsky Island (they lived there then). I almost blurted out that I had nevertheless found time to see Natasha, but checked myself in time.

My account of Smith interested the old man very much. He listened with keener attention. Hearing that my new lodging was damp, perhaps even worse than my old one, and that the rent was six rubles a month, he grew positively heated. He had become altogether excitable and impatient. Anna Andreyevna alone knew how to manage him at such moments, and even she was not always successful.

"Hm! This is what comes of your literature, Vanya!" he exclaimed almost spitefully. "It's brought you to a garret, and it will bring you to the graveyard yet! I told you so at the time. I foretold it! Is B. still writing reviews?"

"But he's dead, he died of consumption. I told you so before, I believe."

"Dead, hm, dead! Yes, that's just what one would expect. Well, has he left anything to his wife and children?"

You told me he had a wife, didn't you? And why do such people marry?"

"No, he's left nothing," I answered.

"Well, just as I thought!" he cried, with as much passion as though the matter closely and intimately concerned him, as though the deceased B. had been his own brother. "Nothing! Nothing, you may be sure. And, do you know, Vanya, I had a presentiment he'd end like that, even before when you were always singing his praises, do you remember? It's easy to say left nothing! Hm!... So he's won fame. Well, I suppose so, but even if it's immortal fame, it doesn't mean bread and butter. I always had a foreboding about you, too, Vanya, my boy. Though I praised you, I always had my misgivings. So B.'s dead? Yes, and he well might be! It's a nice way we live here, and ... a nice place, look!"

And with a rapid, spontaneous movement of his hand he pointed to the foggy vista of the street, lighted by street-lamps dimly twinkling in the damp mist, to the dirty houses, to the wet and shining flagstones, to the cross, sullen, drenched figures that passed by, to all this picture, hemmed in by the dome of the Petersburg sky, black as though smudged with Indian ink. We had by now come out into the square; before us in the darkness stood the monument, lighted up from below by jets of gas, and further away rose the huge dark mass of St. Isaac's, hardly distinguishable against the gloomy sky.

"You used to say, Vanya, that he was a nice man, good and generous, sensitive and with a warm heart. Well, you see, they're all like that, your nice people, your men with warm hearts. All they can do is to beget orphans! Hm!... and I should think he must have felt cheerful at dying like that! My, my! Anything to get away from here! Even to Siberia.... What is it, child?" he asked suddenly, seeing a little girl on the pavement begging alms.

It was a pale, thin child, not more than seven or eight, dressed in filthy rags; she had broken shoes on her little bare feet. She was trying to cover her shivering little body with a sort of aged semblance of a tiny dress, long outgrown. Her pale, sickly, wasted face was turned towards us. She looked at us timidly and mutely, and held out her trembling little hand with a look of resigned dread of refusal. The old man started at seeing her, and turned to her so quickly that he even frightened her. She shrank away.

"What is it? What is it, child?" he cried. "You're begging, eh? Here, here's something for you . . . take it!"

Flustered and shaking with excitement, he began feeling in his pocket, and brought out two or three silver coins. But it seemed to him too little. He found his purse, and taking out a ruble note—all that was in it—put it in the little beggar's hand.

"Christ keep you, my little one . . . my child! Let the angels keep you!"

And with a trembling hand he made the sign of the cross over the child several times. But suddenly remembering that I was there too and was looking on, he frowned, and walked on with rapid steps.

"That's a thing I can't bear to see, Vanya," he began, after a rather prolonged, irate silence. "Little innocent creatures shivering with cold in the street . . . all because of their cursed fathers and mothers. Though what mother would send a child to anything so awful if she were not in utmost misery herself! . . . Most likely she has other helpless little orphans huddling in the corner at home, and this is the eldest of them; and the mother ill herself; and . . . hm! They're not prince's children! There are many children in the world, Vanya . . . who are not prince's children! Hm!"

He paused for a moment, as though at a loss for words.

"You see, Vanya, I promised Anna Andreyevna," he

began, faltering and hesitating a little, "I promised her . . . that is Anna Andreyevna and I agreed together to take a little orphan to bring up . . . some poor little girl, you know, take her into our home altogether, do you understand? For it's dull for us old people alone. Only, you see, Anna Andreyevna has begun to set herself against it somehow. Talk to her, will you, not from me, you know, but as if it was your own idea . . . persuade her, do you understand? I've been long meaning to ask you that you try and persuade her to agree; you see, it's rather awkward for me to press her. Oh, anyway, it's not important! What's a child to me? I don't want one; perhaps just as a comfort . . . so as to hear a child's voice . . . but actually, to tell you the truth, I'm doing this for the old woman's sake—it'll be jollier for her than being alone with me. But all that's nonsense! Vanya, we shall be a long time getting there like this, you know; let's take a cab. It's a long walk, and Anna Andreyevna will be worrying. . . ."

It was half past seven when we arrived.

CHAPTER XII

The Ikhmenevs were very fond of each other. Their love and their years of habit bound them to each other for ever. Yet Nikolai Sergeich not only now, but even before, in their happiest days, had always been rather reserved with his Anna Andreyevna, sometimes even forbidding, especially when others were present. Some delicate and sensitive natures show a peculiar stubbornness, a sort of chaste dislike of expressing themselves, and exhibiting their tenderness even to the being dearest to them, not only in public but in private too—even more in private in fact: only at rare intervals their affection breaks out, and the longer it has been restrained the more

passionately and more impulsively it expresses itself. This was rather how Ikhmenev had been with his Anna Andreyevna right from their early days. He loved and respected her beyond measure in spite of the fact that she was only a good-natured woman who was capable of nothing but loving him, and it annoyed him terribly that she, on her part, was at times too indiscreetly open with him in the simplicity of her heart. But after Natasha had gone away they somehow became tenderer to one another; they were painfully conscious of being left all alone in the world. And though Nikolai Sergeich became extremely morose sometimes, they could not be apart for two hours at a time without feeling distressed and uneasy. They had made a sort of tacit compact not to say a word about Natasha, as though she did not exist at all. Anna Andreyevna did not even dare make any allusion to her in her husband's presence, although this restraint was very hard for her. In her own heart she had long ago forgiven Natasha. It had somehow become an established custom that every time I came I should bring her news of her beloved and never-forgotten child.

The old woman became quite ill if she did not get news for some time, and when I came with tidings she wanted to know every smallest detail, and questioned me with trembling curiosity. My accounts relieved her heart; she almost died of fright once when Natasha had fallen ill, and was on the point of going to her herself. But this was an extreme case. At first she was not able to bring herself to express even to me a desire to see her daughter, and almost always after our talk, when she had extracted everything from me, she considered it compulsory to make a show of hardness for my benefit and declare that though she was interested in her daughter's fate, yet Natasha had behaved so wickedly that she could never be forgiven. But all this was feigned. There were times when Anna Andreyevna grieved to distraction, wept,

called Natasha by the fondest names before me, bitterly complained against Nikolai Sergeich, and began in his presence to drop hints, although with great circumspection, about some people's pride, about hard-heartedness, about our not being able to forgive injuries, and God's not forgiving the unforgiving; but she never went further than this in his presence. And then the old man would immediately become grim and sullen and would sit silent and scowling, or would suddenly change the subject awkwardly and very loudly, or would go off to his own room, leaving us alone, and so giving Anna Andreyevna a chance to pour out her sorrows to me in tears and lamentations. He always went off to his own room like this when I arrived, sometimes barely exchanging greetings with me, so as to give me an opportunity to tell Anna Andreyevna all the latest news of Natasha. He did the same thing now.

"I'm wet through," he said, as soon as he walked into the room, "I'll go to my room. And you, Vanya, stay here awhile. Such a business he's been having with his lodgings. You tell her, I'll be back directly."

And he hurried away, trying not to look at us even, as though ashamed of having brought us together. On such occasions, and especially when he came back, he was always very petulant and forbidding, both with me and Anna Andreyevna, even captious, as though vexed and angry with himself for his own softness and tractability.

"You see how it is," said Anna Andreyevna, who had of late laid aside all her stiffness with me, and all her mistrust of me; "that's how he always is with me; and yet he knows we see through all his tricks. Why should he keep up a pretence with me? Am I a stranger to him? And about our daughter he's like that too. He might forgive her, you know, perhaps he even wants to forgive her. God knows! He cries at night, I've heard him. But

he keeps up outwardly. He's eaten up with pride. Ivan Petrovich, my dear, tell me quick, where had he been?"

"Nikolai Sergeich? I don't know. I was going to ask you."

"I was ever so scared when he went out. He's ill, you know, and in such weather, and so late! Well, I thought, it must be for something important he's gone out; and what can be more important than you know what I mean. I thought this to myself, but I didn't dare ask. Why, I daren't question him about anything nowadays. My goodness! I was simply stiff with fright on his account and on hers. What, thought I, if he has gone to her? What if he's made up his mind to forgive her? Why, he's found out everything, he knows the latest news of her; I feel certain he knows it; but how the news gets to him I can't imagine. He was terribly depressed yesterday, and today too. But why don't you say something? Tell me, my dear, what else has happened there? I've been waiting for you like one of God's angels. I've been all eyes looking out for you. Come, is the villain going to abandon Natasha?"

I told Anna Andreyevna at once all I knew. I never held anything back from her. I told her that things seemed really drifting to a rupture between Natasha and Alyosha, and that this was more serious than their previous misunderstandings; that Natasha had sent me a note the day before, begging me to come this evening at nine o'clock, and so I had not intended to come and see them that evening. Nikolai Sergeich himself had brought me. I explained and told her minutely that the position was now altogether critical, that Alyosha's father, who had been back for a fortnight after an absence, would not listen to anything and was taking Alyosha sternly in hand; but, what mattered most was that Alyosha himself seemed not disinclined to the proposed match, and it was said he had actually fallen in love with the young lady. I added that as far as I could guess Natasha's note was

written in great agitation. She wrote that tonight everything would be decided, but what was to be decided I did not know. It was also strange that she had written yesterday but had only asked me to come this evening, and had fixed the hour—nine o'clock. And so I was bound to go, and as quickly as possible.

"Go, my dear boy, go by all means!" Anna Andreyevna urged me anxiously. "Just have a cup of tea as soon as he comes back.... Goodness, they haven't brought the samovar! Matryona! Why are you so long with the samovar? She's a ruffian, this maid, that's what she is! Just drink your tea, and then find some good excuse and get away. But be sure to come tomorrow and tell me everything. And come round early! Good heavens! Could some new misfortune have occurred? Though how could things be worse than they are, I don't know. Why, Nikolai Sergeich knows everything, my heart tells me he does. I hear a great deal through Matryona, you know, and she through Agasha, and Agasha is the goddaughter of Marya Vasilyevna, who lives in the prince's house... but there, you know all that. My Nikolai was terribly angry today. I tried to mollify him one way and another and he almost shouted at me. And then he seemed sorry, said he was short of money. As if he's the kind to shout because of money. Oh well, you know our circumstances. After dinner we went to have a nap. I peeped at him through the chink (there's a chink in the door he doesn't know of). And he, poor dear, was on his knees, praying before the icons. I felt my legs give way under me when I saw it. He didn't sleep, and he had no tea, he just took up his hat and went out. He went out after four. I didn't dare question him: he'd have shouted at me. He's taken to shouting lately—mostly at Matryona but sometimes at me too. And when he starts shouting it makes my legs go numb, and there's a sinking at my heart. Of course it's just tantrums, but still it frightens me. I prayed for a

whole hour after he went out that God should show him the light! Where is her note, let me see it!"

I showed it. I knew that Anna Andreyevna cherished a secret dream that Alyosha, whom she called a villain one moment and a stupid heartless boy the next, would eventually marry Natasha, and that the prince, his father, would consent to it. She even let this slip out to me, though at other times she regretted it, and went back on her words. But never would she venture to express her hopes in Nikolai Sergeich's presence, though she knew her husband suspected them, and even reproached her for them indirectly more than once. I believe that he would have cursed Natasha and wrenched her out of his heart for ever if he learnt of the possibility of this marriage.

We all thought so at the time. He longed for his daughter with all his heart, but he longed for her alone, repentant, with every memory of Alyosha cast out of her heart. It was the one condition of forgiveness, and though it was not uttered in words it was clear and obvious when one looked at him.

"He's a silly boy with no backbone, no backbone at all, and he's cruel, I always said so," Anna Andreyevna began again. "And they didn't know how to bring him up properly, so he's turned out a regular weather-cock; he's abandoning her after all the love she's given him. Oh merciful God! What will become of her, poor child? And what can he have found in this new one, I wonder."

"I have heard, Anna Andreyevna," I replied, "that his proposed fiancée is a charming girl, and Natalya Nikolayevna says the same thing about her."

"Don't you believe it!" the mother interrupted. "Charming, indeed! You scribblers think everyone's charming so long as she dangles a skirt. As for Natasha's speaking well of her, she does that in the generosity of her heart. She doesn't know how to hold him; she forgives him everything, while she suffers terribly herself. How often

he has deceived her already. The cruel-hearted villains! It simply terrifies me, Ivan Petrovich! They're all demented with pride. If my good man would only humble his pride, if he would forgive my poor darling and fetch her home! I would hold her close to my heart and look and look at her! Has she grown thinner?"

"Yes, she has, Anna Andreyevna."

"My darling! I'm in terrible trouble, Ivan Petrovich! I've been crying all night and all day ... but there! ... I'll tell you about it afterwards. How many times I began hinting to him to forgive her; I daren't say it right out, so I have to do it in a roundabout, cunning sort of way. And my heart's in a flutter all the time: what if he gets angry and curses her altogether? I haven't heard him curse her yet ... well, that's what I'm afraid of, that he'll put his curse upon her. And what will happen then? God's punishment falls on the child the father has cursed. So I'm in a fever of terror all the time. And you ought to be ashamed, too, Ivan Petrovich—to think you've grown up in our family, and been treated like a son by both of us, and yet you come here with this silly talk: charming, my foot! As if you'd know! But their Marya Vasilyevna knows better. (I've taken a sin upon my conscience and asked her in to coffee one day when my good man had gone out for the whole morning.) She told me all the ins and outs of it. The prince, Alyosha's father, used to be in sinful relations with this countess. They say the countess has long been insisting on his marrying, but he kept dodging out of it. This here countess was known for her shameless behaviour even while her husband was still living. When her husband died she went abroad; she used to have all sorts of Italians and Frenchmen about her, and barons of some sort—it was there she caught Prince Pyotr Alexandrovich. And meantime her stepdaughter, the child of her first husband, the spirit contractor, has been growing up. This countess, the step-

mother, has spent all she had, while the stepdaughter has been growing up, and the two millions her father had left invested for her have been growing too. Now, they say, she has three millions. The prince got an idea that it would make a fine match for Alyosha. (He's a sharp fellow! He won't let a chance slip, never you fear!) The count, their relative, who's a grand gentleman at court, you remember, has given his approval too; a fortune of three millions is not to be sneezed at. 'All right,' he said, 'talk it over with the countess.' So the prince tells the countess of his wishes. She opposes it tooth and nail. She's an unprincipled woman, a regular termagant, they say! I hear there are some here who won't receive her any more, it's not like abroad. 'No,' she says, 'you marry me yourself, prince, and as for my stepdaughter's marrying Alyosha, that's definitely out of the question!' And the girl, they say, simply adores her stepmother; she just worships her and obeys her in everything. She's a gentle creature, they say, a perfect angel! The prince sees how it is and tells the countess not to worry. 'You've spent all your money,' says he, 'and your debts you'll never be able to pay. But as soon as your stepdaughter marries Alyosha there'll be a pair of them: your innocent and my little fool. We'll take them under our wing and be their guardians together. Then you'll have plenty of money too. What good will it do you to marry me?' He's a sharp fellow, this one! Six months ago the countess couldn't make up her mind to it, but since then, they say, they've been to Warsaw together, and there they've come to an agreement. That's what I've heard. Marya Vasilyevna has told me all this, all the inside story. She heard it all on good authority. So you see it's all a question of money and millions, and charming or not has nothing to do with it!"

Anna Andreyevna's story impressed me. It fitted in exactly with all I myself had heard from Alyosha. When he talked of it he put on a brave front and declared that

he would never marry for money. But he had been fascinated and attracted by Katerina Fyodorovna. I had heard from Alyosha, too, that his father was also contemplating marriage, though he denied all rumour of it to avoid irritating the countess prematurely. I have mentioned already that Alyosha was very fond of his father, admired him and boasted of him, and believed in him as though he were an oracle.

"She's not so highly born, either, that 'charming' one of yours," Anna Andreyevna went on, deeply resenting my praise of the young prince's future fiancée. "Why, Natasha would be a better match for him. The other one's a spirit-dealer's daughter, while Natasha is a well-born girl of a good old family. Yesterday (I forgot to tell you) my old man opened his chest—you know, the one with wrought-iron fittings, and he sat opposite me the whole evening, sorting out our old family papers. And so solemn he was, too. I was knitting a stocking, and I didn't look at him; I was afraid to. When he saw I didn't say a word he got cross, and spoke to me himself, and he spent the whole evening explaining our family tree to me. And do you know, it seems that the Ikhmenevs were noblemen as far back as the days of Ivan the Terrible, and that my family, the Shumilovs, were well known even in Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich's time; we've the documents to prove it, and it's mentioned in Karamzin's history too. So you see, my dear boy, we're as good as some on that score. As soon as my old man began talking to me of those things I saw what was on his mind. Evidently he feels hurt too that Natasha is being slighted. It's only through their wealth they're set above us. Well, let that robber, Pyotr Alexandrovich, worry about wealth; everyone knows he's a callous, greedy soul. They say he joined the Jesuits in secret when he was in Warsaw. Is it true?"

"It's a stupid rumour," I answered, though I could not help wondering at the persistence of this rumour.

But what she had told me of her husband's going over his family records was curious. He had never boasted of his family tree before.

"They're all cruel-hearted villains!" Anna Andreyevna went on. "Well, tell me about my darling. Is she grieving and crying? My, it's time you went to her! (Matryona! Matryona! She's a real ruffian, that one!) They haven't insulted her, have they? Tell me, Vanya?"

What could I answer her? The poor lady was in tears. I asked her what was the fresh trouble of which she had been going to tell me.

"Oh, my dear boy! One might think we hadn't trouble enough! It seems our cup was not full enough! You remember, my dear, or perhaps you don't, I had a little locket set in gold—a keepsake, and in it a portrait of Natasha as a child. She was eight years old then, my little angel. We had it made by a travelling artist at the time. But I see you've forgotten! He was a good artist. He painted her as a cupid! She'd such fair hair in those days, all fluffy. He painted her in a little muslin smock, so that her little body shows through, and she looked so pretty in it you couldn't take your eyes off her. I begged the artist to put little wings on her, but he wouldn't agree. Well then, my dear, after all our dreadful troubles, I took it out of the box and hung it round my neck, and I've been wearing it beside my cross ever since, though I was scared to death he might see it. You know he told me at the time to throw all her things out of the house, or burn them, so that nothing might remind us of her. But at least her portrait I must have to look at, sometimes I cry, looking at it, and it comforts me a bit. And another time when I'm alone I keep kissing it as if it were really her I was kissing. I call her the fondest names, and make the sign of the cross over her every night. I talk aloud to her when I'm alone, ask her a question and pretend she has answered, and ask her another. Oh,

Vanya, dear, it makes me sad to talk about it! Well, so I was glad he knew nothing of the locket and hadn't noticed it. But yesterday morning the locket was gone. The string hung loose. It must have worn through and I'd dropped it. I was struck dumb. I hunted and hunted high and low—not a trace. It had simply vanished! And where could it have dropped? I thought perhaps I'd lost it in bed, and rummaged through everything. Nowhere! If it had come off and dropped, someone might have picked it up, and who could it have been except him or Matryona? I'd never think it was Matryona, she's devoted to me heart and soul. (Matryona, are you going to bring that samovar or not?) I keep thinking what will happen if he finds it? It grieves me so, I keep crying and crying and just can't keep back my tears. And Nikolai Sergeich is so gentle and kind to me as if he knows what I am grieving about, and is sorry for me. And that starts me wondering, how could he know? Perhaps he's really found the locket and has thrown it out of the window? In anger he's capable of it, you know. He must have thrown it out and now he's sad about it himself and sorry he did it. I've already looked below the window outside with Matryona—but I found nothing. It simply vanished. I cried all night through. It was the first time that I did not bless her for the night. Oh, it's a bad sign, Ivan Petrovich, it's a bad sign, it's an omen of evil; I've been crying my eyes out for two days now. I've been waiting for you, my dear, like one of God's angels, if only to get it off my chest..." and the poor lady wept bitterly.

"Oh yes, I forgot to tell you," she began suddenly, pleased at remembering. "Did he tell you anything about an orphan girl?"

"Yes, Anna Andreyevna. He told me you had both thought of it, and agreed to take a poor girl, an orphan, to bring up. Is that true?"

"Not I, my dear boy, not I; I don't want any orphan girl. She'll remind me of our bitter lot, our misfortune! I want no one but Natasha. She was my only child, and she shall remain the only one. But what does it mean that he should have thought of an orphan? What do you think, Ivan Petrovich? Is it to comfort me, do you suppose, looking at my tears, or does he want to drive his own daughter out of his mind altogether, and attach himself to another child. What did he say about me on the way here? How did he seem to you—morose, angry? Tss! Here he is! Afterwards, my dear, you'll tell me afterwards. Don't forget to come tomorrow."

CHAPTER XIII

The old man came in. He looked at us with curiosity and as though ashamed of something, frowned, and went up to the table.

"Where's the samovar?" he asked. "Do you mean to say she couldn't bring it till now?"

"It's coming, my dear, it's coming. Why, here it is!" said Anna Andreyevna fussily.

Matryona appeared with the samovar the moment she saw Nikolai Sergeich, as if she had been waiting for him to come in before she brought it. She was an old, tried and devoted servant, but the most self-willed and grumpy servant in the world—an obstinate and stubborn creature. She was afraid of Nikolai Sergeich and always curbed her tongue in his presence. But she made up for it with Anna Andreyevna, was rude to her at every turn, and openly attempted to govern her mistress, though at the same time she had a warm and genuine affection for her and for Natasha. I had known Matryona since the old days at Ikhmenevka.

"Hm! It's bad enough to get wet through and here they

don't want to give you any tea, " the old man grumbled under his breath.

Anna Andreyevna at once winked at me. He could not endure these mysterious signals; and while he tried not to look at us, his face showed quite clearly that he was well aware that Anna Andreyevna had just signalled to me about him.

"I have been to see about my case, Vanya," he began suddenly. "It's such a wretched business. Did I tell you? It's going against me altogether. It appears I've no proofs; I'm lacking certain documents; the papers are invalid apparently. Hm!"

He was speaking of his lawsuit with the prince, which was still dragging on, but had taken a very bad turn for Nikolai Sergeich. I was silent, not knowing what to answer. He looked suspiciously at me.

"Well!" he brought out suddenly, as though irritated by our silence, "the sooner the better! They won't make a scoundrel of me, even if they decide I must pay. My conscience is clear, so let them decide as they wish. At least the case will be over; they'll settle it ... ruin me. ... I'll throw everything up and go to Siberia."

"Good heavens! What a place to go to. And why so far?" Anna Andreyevna could not resist saying.

"And what are we near to here?" he asked rudely, apparently glad of the objection.

"Why, near people ... anyway," began Anna Andreyevna, and she glanced at me in distress.

"What sort of people?" he cried, turning his feverish eyes from me to her and back again. "What people? Robbers, slanderers, traitors? There are plenty of them everywhere; don't you worry, we shall find them in Siberia too. But if you don't want to come with me you can stay here. I won't force you to it."

"Nikolai Sergeich, my dear! Who would you leave me with? Why, I've no one but you in the whole..." cried poor Anna Andreyevna.

She faltered, broke off, and turned to me with a look of alarm, as though begging for help and support. The old man was in a state of extreme irritation and was ready to take offence at anything; he was not to be contradicted.

"Come now, Anna Andreyevna," said I. "It's not half as bad in Siberia as you think. If the worst comes to the worst and you have to sell Ikhmenevka, Nikolai Sergeich's plan is very good in fact. In Siberia he might get a good private post, and then...."

"Well, *you* at least are talking sense, Ivan. That's just what I thought. I'll give up everything and go away."

"Well, that I never did expect," cried Anna Andreyevna, flinging up her arms. "And you, too, Vanya! I didn't expect this of you of all people! Why, you've never known anything but kindness from us, and now...."

"Ha, ha, ha! What else did you expect? Why, what are we to live on here, consider that! Our money's spent, we've come to our last farthing. Perhaps you'd like me to go to Prince Pyotr Alexandrovich and beg his pardon, eh?"

Hearing the prince's name, Anna Andreyevna trembled with fear. The teaspoon in her hand tinkled sharply against the saucer.

"No, but really," Ikhmenev went on, working himself up with malicious, obstinate pleasure, "what do you think, Vanya? Perhaps I really should go to him? Why go to Siberia? I'd better put on my best clothes, comb and brush myself tomorrow, Anna Andreyevna will starch me a new shirt-front (one can't go to see a person like that without!), I'll buy myself a new pair of gloves, for full measure; and then I'll go to his excellency: 'Your Excellency, our father and benefactor! Forgive me and have

pity on me! Give me a crust of bread! I've a wife and little children!' Is that right, Anna Andreyevna? Is that what you want?"

"Oh dear! I want nothing! I spoke without thinking. Forgive me if I vexed you, only don't shout," she brought out, trembling more and more violently in her terror.

I am convinced that his heart ached and writhed painfully, as he looked at his poor wife's tears and alarm; I am sure that he was suffering far more than she was, but he could not control himself. It happens sometimes with the kindest but high-strung people that in spite of their kindness they allow their own grief and anger to carry them away to a pitch of selfish delight in it, and they seek to express themselves at any cost, even that of wounding another—someone innocent and in most cases the one who is nearest and dearest to them. A woman sometimes has a craving to feel unhappy and aggrieved, even if she has no unhappiness or grievance. There are many men resembling women in this respect, and men, indeed, who are by no means weak, and have very little that is feminine about them. The old man had a compelling impulse to quarrel, though he was made miserable by it himself.

I remember that the thought flashed through my mind at the time: could he really have gone out on a venture such as Anna Andreyevna suspected? What if God had softened his heart, and he had really been going to Natasha, and had changed his mind on the way, or something had gone wrong, and made him give up his intentions, as was sure to happen; and now he had returned home angry and humiliated, ashamed of his recent feelings and wishes, looking out for someone on whom to vent his anger for his own weakness, and pitching on the very ones whom he suspected of sharing the same feelings and wishes. Perhaps, when he wanted to forgive his daughter, he pictured the joy and rapture of his poor

Anna Andreyevna, and when it came to nothing she was of course the first to suffer for it.

But her stricken look as she trembled with fear before him, touched him. He seemed ashamed of his wrath, and for a minute controlled himself. We were all silent. I was trying not to look at him. But the good moment did not last long. At all costs he must express himself by some outburst, or a curse if need be.

"You see, Vanya," he said suddenly, "I'm sorry, I'd rather not say anything, but the time has come when I must speak out openly without evasion, as every straightforward man should . . . do you understand, Vanya? I'm glad you have come, and so I want to say aloud in your presence so that *others* may hear as well that I am sick of all this nonsense, all these tears, and sighs, and misery. That which I have wrenched out of my heart with so much blood and pain perhaps, will never be back in my heart again. No! I have said it and I shall act on it. I'm speaking of what happened six months ago—you understand, Vanya? And I speak of this so openly, so directly, that you may make no mistake about my words," he added, looking at me with bloodshot eyes and obviously avoiding his wife's frightened glances. "I repeat: this is nonsense; I won't have it! What maddens me is that everyone thinks me capable of having such low, such weak feelings, as though I were a fool, as though I were the most abject scoundrel . . . they think I am going mad with grief. . . . Nonsense! I have cast away, I have forgotten my old feelings! There are no memories for me! No! no! no! and no! . . ."

He jumped up from his chair, and brought down his fist on the table so that the cups tinkled.

"Nikolai Sergeich! Have you no pity for Anna Andreyevna! Look what you are doing to her!" I said, unable to restrain myself and looking at him almost with indignation. But it was only pouring oil on the flames.

"No, I haven't!" he shouted, trembling and turning white. "I haven't, for no one has pity for me! For in my own house they're all plotting against me in my dishonour, siding with my depraved daughter, who deserves my curse, and every punishment!"

"Nikolai Sergeich, don't curse her! Whatever you do—don't curse our daughter!" screamed Anna Andreyevna.

"Yes, I will curse her!" shouted the old man, twice as loud as before; "because—insulted and dishonoured as I am—I am expected to go to that accursed one and ask her forgiveness! Yes, yes, that's what it is! I'm tormented in this way in my own house day and night, with tears and sighs and stupid hints! You want to soften me. Look, Vanya, look," he added, hastily taking papers out of his side-pocket, with trembling hands, "here are the notes of our case: it transpires now that I'm a thief, that I'm a scoundrel, that I have robbed my benefactor! I am dishonoured, disgraced, because of her! There, there, look, look!"

And he began pulling out of the side-pocket of his coat various papers, throwing them on the table one after another, hunting impatiently amongst them for the one he wanted to show me; but, as luck would have it, the one he sought could not be found. Impatiently he jerked out of his pocket everything that his hand had clutched, and suddenly something fell heavily on the table with a clank. Anna Andreyevna gasped. It was the lost locket.

I could scarcely believe my eyes. The blood rushed to the old man's head and flooded his cheeks; he started. Anna Andreyevna stood with clasped hands looking at him imploringly. Her face lit up with lucid, joyful hope. The old man's flush, his embarrassment before us. . . . No, she was not mistaken, she knew now how her locket had disappeared!

She understood now that he had picked it up, delighted at his find, and, perhaps, quivering with joy, had jealous-

ly hidden it from all eyes; that in solitude, unseen by all, he had gazed at the face of his adored child with infinite love, had gazed and could not gaze enough; that perhaps like the poor mother he had shut himself away from everyone to talk to his precious Natasha, imagining her replies and answering them himself; and at night in agonizing grief, with suppressed sobs he had caressed and kissed the dear image, and instead of curses invoked forgiveness and blessings on her whom he would not see and whom he cursed before others.

"Dear one, then you love her still!" cried Anna Andreyevna, unable to restrain herself any further in the presence of the stern father who had just cursed her Natasha.

But no sooner had he heard her exclamation than an insane fury flashed in his eyes. He snatched up the locket, threw it violently on the floor, and started trampling it with his foot in a frenzy.

"I curse you, I curse you, for ever and ever!" he shouted hoarsely, gasping for breath. "For ever! For ever!"

"Good God!" cried the mother. "Her! My Natasha! Her darling face!... trampling on it! With his feet! Tyrant! You cruel, unfeeling, and arrogant man!"

Hearing his wife's cry the frantic old man stopped short, horrified at what he was doing. Suddenly he snatched up the locket from the floor and rushed towards the door, but he had not taken two steps when he fell on his knees, and dropping his arms on the sofa before him, let his head fall helplessly on them.

He sobbed like a child, like a woman. Sobs wrung his breast as though they would rend it. The wrathful old man in a flash became weaker than a child. Oh, now he could not curse her; now he was past shame before either of us, and in a feverish surge of love he covered with kisses the portrait he had just been trampling underfoot. It seemed all his tenderness, all his love for his daughter, so long restrained, strived to burst out now

with irresistible force, and shattered his whole being with it.

"Forgive her, forgive her!" Anna Andreyevna begged, sobbing, bending over him and embracing him. "Bring her back to her home, my dear, and at the day of judgment the Lord himself will reward you for your mercy and humility!"

"No, no! Not for the world! Never!" he exclaimed in a husky, choking voice. "Never! Never!"

CHAPTER XIV

It was late, ten o'clock, when I got to Natasha's. She was living at that time in Fontanka, near the Semyonovsky Bridge, on the fourth floor, in the dirty block of flats belonging to the merchant Kolotushkin. When first she left home she had lived for a time with Alyosha in a very good flat, small, but pretty and comfortable, on the third floor of a house in Liteyny. But the young prince's resources were soon exhausted. He did not become a music teacher, but kept borrowing money and was soon very heavily in debt. He spent his money on decorating the flat and on making presents to Natasha, who tried to check his extravagance, scolded him, and sometimes even cried about it. Alyosha, with his emotional and impressionable nature, revelled sometimes for a whole week in dreams of how he would make her a present and how she would receive it, making of this a real treat for himself and rapturously telling me beforehand of his dreams and anticipations. Then he was so downcast at her tears and reproofs that one felt sorry for him, and as time went on these presents became the cause of reproaches, bitterness, and quarrels. Besides that, Alyosha spent a great deal of money without telling Natasha: he kept pace with his old friends, and was

unfaithful to her, visiting all sorts of Josephines and Minnas; though at the same time he still loved Natasha dearly. He loved her with a painful sort of love; he often came to see me depressed and melancholy, declaring that he was not worth Natasha's little finger, that he was coarse and wicked, incapable of understanding her and unworthy of her love. He was partly right: there was no equality between them at all; he felt like a child compared with her, and she always looked upon him as a child. He confessed to me with tears in his eyes of his relations with Josephine, while he besought me not to say a word to Natasha. And when, after these admissions to me, he went back to her timid and trembling (insisting on my coming too, and declaring that he was afraid to look at her after what he had done, and that I alone could help him through), Natasha knew from the first glance at him what was the matter. She was terribly jealous, and I do not understand how she managed to forgive him all his lapses. This was how it usually happened: Alyosha would go in with me, timidly address her, and look with timid tenderness into her eyes. She guessed at once that he had been doing wrong, but showed no sign of it, was never the first to begin on the subject, never questioned him, but instead she redoubled her caresses and became sweeter and merrier—and this was not acting or premeditated strategy on her part. No; her fine nature found infinite bliss in forgiving and being merciful; as though in the very process of forgiving Alyosha there was a peculiar, subtle charm for her. It is true that so far the question only concerned Josephines. Seeing her so meek and forgiving, Alyosha could not restrain himself and at once confessed the whole story without being asked any questions—to get it off his conscience and “to be the same as before,” as he said. Her forgiveness made him ecstatic, sometimes he even cried with joy and emotion, kissing and embracing her.

Then instantly his spirits would rise, and he would begin with childlike frankness to give her a full account of his adventures with Josephine; he laughed, blessed Natasha, and praised her to the skies, and the evening ended happily and merrily. When all his money was gone he began selling his things. At Natasha's insistence a cheap little flat in Fontanka was found for her. They went on selling their things; Natasha even had to sell her own gowns and began looking for work. When Alyosha heard of it his despair knew no bounds; he cursed himself, cried out that he despised himself, but meantime did nothing to improve the situation. By now this last resource was exhausted too; nothing was left for Natasha but her very poorly paid work.

At the very beginning when they were still living together, Alyosha had quarrelled violently with his father about it. Prince Valkovsky's intention to marry his son to Katerina Fyodorovna Filimonova, the countess's step-daughter, was only a project at the time, but he insisted upon it strongly. He took Alyosha to see the young lady, coaxed him to try and make her like him, and attempted to persuade him by arguments and severity. But the plan fell through owing to the countess. Then Alyosha's father shut his eyes to his son's affair with Natasha, leaving it to time. Knowing Alyosha's fickleness and frivolity he hoped that the love affair would soon be over. As for the possibility of his marrying Natasha the prince had till lately ceased to trouble his mind about it, while the lovers put off the question until the formal reconciliation with his father or until there was a change in the situation. However, the thing was that Natasha was evidently unwilling to broach the subject. Alyosha let slip to me in secret that his father seemed a bit pleased in a way at the whole business: he was enjoying the humbling of Ikhmenev in this affair. For form's sake he kept up a show of displeasure with his son, decreased his

by no means liberal allowance (he was exceedingly stingy with him), and threatened to stop even that. But he soon went away to Poland in pursuit of the countess, who had business there, as active in his matchmaking as ever. Alyosha, it is true, was rather young to be married, but the girl was too wealthy, and it was unthinkable to let a chance like that slip by. The prince at last attained his object. Rumour reached us that the matter had begun to take a favourable turn. At the time I am describing, the prince had only just returned to Petersburg. He met his son affectionately, but the persistence of Alyosha's connection with Natasha was an unpleasant surprise to him. He began to have doubts, to feel nervous. He sternly and emphatically insisted on his son's breaking it off, but soon a much more effectual mode of attack occurred to him, and he carried off Alyosha to the countess. Her stepdaughter, though she was scarcely more than a child, was almost a perfect beauty, gay, clever, and sweet, with a heart of rare goodness and a candid, uncorrupted soul. The prince calculated that the lapse of six months must have had some effect, that Natasha could no longer have the charm of novelty for his son and that he would now regard his proposed fiancée with a different feeling than he had done six months before. He was only partly right in his reckoning. Alyosha certainly was attracted. I must add that the father all of a sudden became extraordinarily affectionate to him (though he still refused to give him money). Alyosha felt that his father's greater warmth concealed an unchanged, inflexible determination, and this made him unhappy—but not so unhappy as he would have been if he had not been seeing Katerina Fyodorovna every day. I knew that he had not been to Natasha's for five days now. On my way to her from the Ikhmenevs I wondered uneasily what it was she wanted to tell me. I discerned a light in her window a long way off. It had long

been arranged between us that she should put a candle in the window if she were in great and urgent need of me, so that if I happened to pass by (and this did happen nearly every evening) I would know from that light that I was expected and she needed me. Of late she had often put the candle in the window....

CHAPTER XV

I found Natasha alone. She was slowly walking up and down the room, with her hands clasped on her bosom, lost in thought. A samovar, with the coals in it dying down, stood on the table—long since awaiting me. With a smile she held out her hand to me. Her face was pale and spoke of suffering. There was something of a martyr, something tender and patient in her smile. Her clear blue eyes seemed to have grown larger, her hair looked thicker than before. The wanness and thinness of her face gave this impression.

"I began to think you weren't coming," she said, "I was meaning to send Mavra to inquire; I was afraid you might be ill again."

"No, I'm not ill. I was detained. I'll tell you directly. But what's the matter, Natasha, what's happened?"

"Nothing's happened," she answered as though surprised. "Why?"

"Why, you wrote ... you wrote yesterday for me to come, and fixed the hour that I might not come before or after; and that's rather extraordinary."

"Oh yes! I was expecting *him* yesterday."

"Well, hasn't he been here yet?"

"No. And so I was thinking that if he didn't come I must talk things over with you," she added, after a pause.

"And this evening, did you expect him?"

"No, this evening he's *there*."

"What do you think, Natasha, won't he come back at all?"

"Of course he'll come," she answered, looking at me with peculiar earnestness. She did not like the abruptness of my questions. We lapsed into silence, walking up and down the room.

"I've been waiting for you all this time, Vanya, and do you know what I was doing?" she began again with a smile. "I was walking up and down, reciting poetry. Do you remember the bells, the winter road, 'On my table of oak hums the samovar bright'...? We read it together:

*Now the snowstorm is spent; there's a glimmer of
light*

From the millions of dim watching eyes of the night.

"And then:

*Or a passionate voice seems to ring to me clear
With the bells joined in harmony close:*

Oh when will my beloved, my dearest, be here

On my bosom his head to repose!

Look how blissful my home: with the first ray of light

Sparkling playfully on the pane's frosty imprints,

On my table of oak hums the samovar bright

And the fire burns gaily, the flames throwing glints

On the bed in the nook with its curtains of chintz.

How beautiful it is! How tormenting those verses are, Vanya. And what a vivid picture for your imagination! It's just a canvas with a mere pattern chalked on it. It's up to you to embroider upon it! Two sensations: the former, and the latest. That samovar, that chintz curtain—how homelike it all is. It's like some little cottage in

our own small town; I feel as though I could see that cottage: a new one—made of logs—not yet weather-boarded.... And then another picture:

*Or I suddenly hear the same voice ringing clear
With the bell; its sad accents I trace:
Oh, where is my old friend? And I dread he'll come
here*

*With an eager caress and embrace.
What a life! It's so dark in my room and so close,
It's so sad; and the wind's coming in through the
door....*

*While outside only one little cherry-tree grows
But the window is frozen, I see it no more,
And perhaps it has died long before....
What a life! Time has faded the curtains' bright tone;
Sick—I walk to and fro, yet my fam'ly I shun;
There is no one to scold me—my loved one is gone....
Just the old woman grumbling alone....*

“‘Sick—I walk to and fro.’ That ‘sick’ is so well put in. ‘*There is no one to scold me.*’ What tenderness, what nostalgia in that line; what agonies of memory, and agonies you have caused yourself, and are glorying in now! Heavens, how fine it is! How true it is!...”

She ceased speaking, as though struggling with a rising spasm in her throat.

“Vanya dear!” she said a minute later, and she paused again, as if she had forgotten what she meant to say, or had spoken without thinking, from some sudden emotion.

Meanwhile we still walked up and down the room. A light was burning before the icon. Of late Natasha had become more and more devout, and did not like to be spoken to about it.

“Is tomorrow a holiday?” I asked. “Your light is burning.”

"No, it is not a holiday . . . but, Vanya, sit down. You must be tired. Will you have some tea? I don't suppose you've had it yet?"

"Yes, let's sit down, Natasha. But I've had tea already."

"Where have you come from?"

"From *them*."

That's how we always referred to her old home.

"From them? How did you manage it? Did you just drop in? Or did they ask you?"

She besieged me with questions. Her face grew still paler with emotion. I told her in detail of my meeting her father, my conversation with her mother, and the scene with the locket. I told her in detail, describing every shade of feeling. I never concealed anything from her. She listened eagerly, not missing a word. Tears glittered in her eyes. The scene with the locket stirred her profoundly.

"Stop, stop, Vanya," she kept interrupting my story. "Tell me everything precisely, everything as exactly as possible; you're not telling it precisely enough. . . ."

I repeated my story again and again, stopping every other moment to reply to her continual questions about the details.

"And do you really think he was coming to see me?"

"I don't know, Natasha, and in fact I can't form an opinion even. That he grieves for you and loves you is clear enough; but as to whether he had been going to see you, it's . . . it's. . . ."

"And he kissed the locket?" she broke in. "What did he say when he kissed it?"

"He was incoherent—nothing but exclamations; he called you by the tenderest names; he called for you."

"Called for me?"

"Yes."

She wept quietly.

"Poor things!" she said. "And if he knows everything,"

she added after a brief silence, "it's no wonder. He hears a great deal about Alyosha's father, too."

"Natasha," I said timidly. "Let us go to them."

"When?" she asked, turning pale and starting up from her chair. She thought I was urging her to go at once.

"No, Vanya," she added, putting her two hands on my shoulders, and smiling sadly; "no, dear, that's what you're always saying, but ... I'd rather you did not talk about it."

"Will this horrible estrangement never, never be ended then?" I cried mournfully. "Can you be so proud that you don't want to take the first step? It's up to you to do it; you must make the first advance. Perhaps your father's only waiting for that to forgive you. ... He's your father; he has been injured by you! Respect his pride; it's justifiable, it's natural! You've got to do it. Make the attempt, and he will forgive you unconditionally."

"Unconditionally! That is impossible. And don't reproach me, Vanya, unnecessarily. It's been in my thoughts day and night. There's not been a day perhaps since I left them that I haven't thought of it. And then how often you and I have talked about it. You know yourself it's impossible."

"Try!"

"No, my friend, I can't. Even if I did try I should only make him more bitter against me. There's no bringing back what's beyond recall, and do you know what it is in this case that can never be brought back? It's those happy, childhood days I spent with them. If my father did forgive me he would anyway hardly know me now. He loved the little girl; the big baby. He admired my childish simplicity; caressing me he still stroked my hair just like he did when I was a child of seven and sitting upon his knee I sang to him my little childish songs. From my earliest childhood up to the last day he used to come to my bed and bless me for the night. A month before I left

home he bought me some earrings as a surprise (but I found out all about it), and was as pleased as a child, imagining how delighted I should be with the present, and was awfully angry with everyone, and with me especially, when he learnt that I had long known all about his buying them. Three days before I left them he noticed that I was depressed, and he became so depressed himself that it made him ill, and—would you believe it—to divert my mind he thought of buying tickets for the theatre! Yes, indeed, he thought that would cure me. I'm saying it again, he knew and loved the little girl, and refused to think even that I should one day become a woman too. The possibility never entered his head. If I were to go home now he would not know me. Even if he did forgive me he'd meet quite a different person now. I'm not the same; I'm not a child any more, I have gone through a great deal. Even if he found no fault with me he would still be sighing for his past happiness, grieving that I am not the same as I used to be when he loved me as a child. The past always seems best! It's remembered with anguish! Oh, how good the past is, Vanya!" she cried, carried away by her own words and interrupting herself with this exclamation which broke painfully from her heart.

"Everything you've said is true, Natasha," I said. "It means that he will have to get to know and love you afresh. The main thing is to get to know you. Well then? He will come to love you, of course. Surely you can't think that he's incapable of understanding you, he, with a heart as big as his?"

"Oh, Vanya, don't be unfair! What is there to understand in me? I didn't mean that. You see, there's something else: a father's love is a jealous love, too. He feels wronged because all this was started and settled without his knowledge, that he didn't know of it and failed to notice it. He knows that he did not even suspect it, and he puts down the unhappy consequences of our love and my

flight to my 'ungrateful' secretiveness. I did not come to him at the very beginning, I did not confess every impulse of my heart to him; on the contrary I concealed it all within myself. I kept it a secret from him and I assure you, Vanya, that in his heart of hearts this is a worse injury, a worse insult to him than the facts themselves—that I left them and have abandoned myself to my lover. Supposing he did meet me now like a father, warmly and affectionately, yet the seed of discord would remain. The next day, or the day after, there would be disappointments, misunderstandings, reproaches. What's more, he won't forgive me unconditionally. Let us suppose that I'll say to him—and say it truly from the bottom of my heart—that I understand how I have wounded him, and how great is the wrong I have done him. And though it will hurt me if he refuses to understand how much all this *happiness* with Alyosha has cost me, what suffering I myself have borne, I will stifle my feelings, I will put up with anything—but even that will not suffice him. He will demand an impossible retribution from me: he will demand that I curse my past, curse Alyosha and repent of my love for him. He will demand the impossible: to bring back the past, and to erase the last six months from our life. But I shall not curse anyone, and I cannot repent. There's no helping it, it's just the way it has happened. . . . No, Vanya, not now. The time has not come."

"But when will the time come?"

"I don't know. We shall have to win the right to our future happiness by further suffering; buy it with some new agonies. Suffering purifies everything. Oh, Vanya, how much pain there is in the world!"

I was silent and looked at her thoughtfully.

"Why do you look at me like that, Alyosha—I mean Vanya!" she said, smiling at her own mistake.

"I am looking at your smile, Natasha. Where did you get it? You did not have a smile like that before."

"Why, what is there in my smile?"

"The old childish simplicity is still there, it's true. But when you smile it seems as though a pain gripped your heart at the same time. You've grown thinner, Natasha, but your hair seems thicker. What dress is that? Have you had it made while you were still with them?"

"How you do love me, Vanya," she said, looking at me tenderly. "Well, and you, what are you doing now? How is everything with you?"

"Just the same; I'm still writing my novel. But it's difficult; I can't seem to get on. The inspiration's dried up. I dare say I could knock it off somehow, and it might turn out quite amusing. But it's a pity to spoil a good idea. It's one of my favourites. And yet it must be ready in time for the magazine. I've even thought of putting aside the novel and writing a story quickly, something light and graceful, and without a trace of pessimism—that's quite definite, not a trace.... Everyone must be cheerful and happy."

"You poor toiler, you! And how about Smith?"

"But Smith's dead."

"And he hasn't haunted you? I am telling you quite seriously, Vanya; you're ill and your nerves are out of order; you're always lost in such dreams. When you told me about taking that room I noticed it in you. So the room's damp and bad, is it?"

"Oh, I quite forgot, I had an adventure there this evening. But I'll tell you about it afterwards."

She was not listening to me any longer and sat plunged in deep thought.

"I do not understand how I could have left *them* then. I must have been in a fever," she spoke at last, looking at me with an expression that did not seem to expect an answer.

If I had spoken to her at that moment she would not have heard me.

"Vanya," she said in a voice hardly audible, "there was a special reason why I asked you to come."

"What is it?"

"I am parting from him."

"You have parted, or you're going to part?"

"I must put an end to all this. I asked you to come that I might tell you everything, all, all that has been mounting up, and that I've kept from you till now."

This was how she always began confiding her secret intentions to me, and it almost invariably transpired that all these secrets she herself had told me long ago.

"Oh, Natasha, I've heard that from you a thousand times. Of course it's impossible for you to go on living together; your affair is such a strange one; you have nothing in common. But will you have the strength?"

"It was nothing but intentions before, Vanya, but now I have quite made up my mind. I love him beyond everything and yet it seems I am his worst enemy; I am ruining his future for him. He has to be set free. He can't marry me; he hasn't the strength to go against his father. I don't want to bind him either. And so I'm really glad he has fallen in love with the girl they want him to marry. It will make the parting easier for him. I've got to do it! It's my duty. If I love him I've got to sacrifice everything for him. I've got to prove my love for him; it's my duty! Isn't it?"

"But you won't be able to persuade him, you know."

"I'm not going to persuade him. I shall be just the same with him even if he comes in this minute. But I must find some means to make it easier for him to leave me without being conscience-stricken. That's what torments me, Vanya. Help me. Can't you think of something?"

"There is only one way," I said, "to cease loving him altogether and fall in love with someone else. But I doubt whether even that will do; surely you know him, don't you. Here he's not been to see you for five days. Suppose

for a minute that he has left you altogether. You've only to write him that you are leaving him yourself, and he'll come running back to you at once."

"Why do you dislike him, Vanya?"

"I?"

"Yes, you, you! You're his enemy, secret and open. You can't speak of him without vindictiveness. I've noticed a thousand times that it's your greatest pleasure to speak ill of him and blacken him! Yes, blacken him, it's the truth!"

"And you've told me so a thousand times too. Enough, Natasha, let's drop this conversation."

"I should like to move into another lodging," she began again after a silence. "Now, don't be angry, Vanya."

"Well, he'd come to the other lodging, and I assure you I'm not angry."

"Love is strong; a new love might hold him away. If he came back to me it would only be for a moment, don't you think?"

"I don't know, Natasha. Everything with him is so terribly inconsistent. He wants to marry the other girl, and to love you, too. He's somehow able to do both at once."

"If I knew for certain that he loved her I would make up my mind. . . . Vanya! Don't hide anything from me! Is there something you know that you don't want to tell me?"

She looked at me with an anxious, searching gaze.

"I know nothing, my dear, I give you my word of honour; I've always been frank with you. But I'll tell you what I do think: perhaps he's not nearly so much in love with the countess's stepdaughter as we suppose. Just a passing attraction. . . ."

"You think so, Vanya? My God, if I were sure of that! Oh, how I should like to see him at this moment, simply

to look at him! His face would tell me everything. But he doesn't come! He doesn't come!"

"Are you expecting him then, Natasha?"

"No, he's *with her*; I know, I sent to find out. How I should like to have a look at her, too.... Listen, Vanya, I'm talking nonsense, but is it really impossible for me to see her, is it impossible to meet her anywhere? What do you think?"

She waited anxiously to hear what I should say.

"You might see her. But simply to see her wouldn't amount to much."

"It would be enough for me only to see her; I should be able to tell then, for myself. Listen, I have become so stupid, you know. I walk up and down, up and down here, always alone, always alone, always thinking; thoughts come rushing like a whirlwind! It's so horrible! One thing I've thought of, Vanya; couldn't you make her acquaintance? You know the countess admired your novel (you said so yourself at the time). You do attend Prince R.'s evenings occasionally, don't you; she's sometimes there. Try to be presented to her. Or perhaps Alyosha could introduce you. Then you could tell me all about her."

"Natasha, dear, we'll talk of that later. Tell me, do you seriously think you have the strength to face a separation? Look at yourself now; surely you're not calm and composed."

"I... shall... have!" she answered, barely above a whisper. "Anything for him. My whole life for his sake. But you know, Vanya, what I can't bear is his forgetting me while he's *with her*; he is sitting by her now, talking, laughing, as he used to sit here, do you remember? He's looking into her eyes; he always does look at people like that—and it never enters his head that I am here... with you."

She broke off without finishing and looked at me in despair.

"Why, Natasha, only just now you were saying...."

"Let us make our parting mutual, the two of us together," she interrupted with flashing eyes. "I shall even give him my blessing ... but it's hard, Vanya, that he should be the first to forget me! Ah, Vanya, what agony it is! I don't understand myself; it's one thing when you reason it out, but it's another when it comes to doing it. What will become of me!"

"Come, come, Natasha, calm yourself!"

"And now it's five days. Every hour, every minute ... sleeping or waking I think and dream of nothing but him, nothing but him! You know what, Vanya, let's go there. You take me!"

"Calm yourself, Natasha!"

"No, let us go! I've only been waiting for you! I've been thinking about it for the last three days. That was what I meant in my letter to you. You've got to take me; you mustn't refuse me in this ... I've been expecting you ... for three days.... There's a party there this evening. He's there ... let us go!"

She sounded almost delirious. There was a noise in the passage; Mavra seemed to be wrangling with someone.

"Wait, Natasha, who's that?" I asked. "Listen."

She listened with an incredulous smile, and suddenly turned fearfully white.

"My God! Who's there?" she said, almost inaudibly.

She was about to hold me back, but I went into the passage to Mavra. So there! It was Alyosha. He was questioning Mavra about something. She refused to admit him at first.

"Where have you turned up from?" she asked, with an air of authority. "Well, what have you been up to? All right, then, go in, go in! Don't you try to wheedle me now! Go in! Let's hear what you've to say for yourself."

"I'm not afraid of anyone! I'm going in!" said Alyosha, somewhat disconcerted, however.

"Well, go in then! You're too cocky to my taste."

"Well, I am going in! Ah! you're here, too!" he said, catching sight of me. "How nice it is that you're here! Well, here I am, you see. . . . What had I better do?"

"Simply go in," I answered. "What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid of anything, I assure you, for upon my word I haven't done anything wrong. Do you think I have? You'll see; I'll explain it directly. Natasha, may I come in?" he cried with a sort of assumed boldness, standing before the closed door. No one answered.

"What can the matter be?" he asked uneasily.

"Nothing; she was in there just now," I answered. "Only perhaps. . . ."

Alyosha opened the door cautiously and looked timidly about the room. There was no one there.

Suddenly he caught sight of her in the corner, between the cupboard and the window. She stood as though in hiding, more dead than alive. I can't help smiling when I remember it to this day. Alyosha went up to her slowly and warily.

"Natasha, what is it? Good evening, Natasha!" he spoke timidly, looking at her with a sort of alarm.

"Oh, why, it's nothing!" she answered in terrible confusion, as though she was the guilty one. "You . . . will you have some tea?"

"Natasha, listen," Alyosha began, completely at a loss. "You're convinced perhaps that I'm to blame. But I'm not, not a bit. You'll see; I'll tell you everything directly."

"What for?" Natasha whispered. "No, no, you needn't. . . . Come, give me your hand instead and . . . it's all right . . . as usual. . . ." And she came out of the corner. Colour crept back into her cheeks. Her eyes were lowered as though she were afraid to glance at Alyosha.

"Good God!" he cried ecstatically. "If I really were at fault I shouldn't dare look at her after that. Look, look!" he exclaimed, turning to me, "she thinks I am at fault; everything's against me; all appearances are against me! I haven't been here for five days! There are rumours that I'm with my betrothed—and what do I see? She has forgiven me already! Already she says: 'Give me your hand, it's all right'! Natasha, my darling, my angel! I've done nothing wrong and you must know that! Not in the least little bit! Quite the contrary! Quite the contrary!"

"But . . . but you ought to be *there* now. . . . You were invited *there*. . . . How is it you're here? Wh-what time is it?"

"Half past ten! I *have* been there . . . but I said I wasn't well and came away—and—and it's the first time, the first time I've been free these five days. It's the first time I've been able to tear myself away and come to you, Natasha. That is, I could have come before, but I didn't on purpose. And why? You shall know directly. I'll explain; that's just what I've come for, to explain. Only this time I'm really not a bit at fault, I swear I'm not, not a bit, not a bit!"

Natasha raised her head and looked at him. . . . But the eyes that met hers were so truthful; his face was so joyous, so honest and cheerful that it was impossible to disbelieve him. I expected them to cry out and rush into each other's arms, as had often happened before at such reconciliations. But Natasha, as though her happiness were too much for her, dropped her head on her breast and . . . suddenly began to cry softly. . . . And now Alyosha could not contain himself any longer. He threw himself at her feet. He kissed her hands, her feet. He seemed frantic. I pushed an easy-chair towards her. She sank into it. Her legs were giving way beneath her.

PART TWO



CHAPTER I

A minute later we were all laughing as though we were crazy.

"Let me explain; let me explain!" cried Alyosha, his ringing voice rising above our laughter. "They think it's just as usual . . . that I've come with some nonsense . . . I'm telling you that I've got something most interesting to say. Now, will you ever be quiet?"

He was extremely eager to tell his story. His whole appearance showed that he had important news. But the dignified air he assumed in his naive pride at the possession of such news made Natasha laugh at once. I could not help laughing, too. And the angrier he was with us the more we laughed. Alyosha's vexation and then his childish despair reduced us at last to the condition of Gogol's midshipman who roared with laughter if one held up one's finger to him. Mavra, coming out of the kitchen, stood in the doorway and looked at us with grave indignation, vexed that Alyosha had not come in for a good "wiggling" from Natasha, as she had been eagerly anticipating for the last five days, and that we were all so merry instead.

At last Natasha, seeing that our laughter was hurting Alyosha's feelings, stopped laughing.

"Well, what do you want to tell us?" she asked.

"I'll light the samovar, shall I?" asked Mavra, interrupting Alyosha without the slightest ceremony.

"Be off, Mavra, be off!" he cried, waving his hands at her, in a hurry to get rid of her. "I'm going to tell you everything that has happened, is happening, and is going to happen, because I know all about it. I see, my friends, you want to know where I've been for the last five days—that's what I want to tell you, but you won't let me. To

begin with I've been deceiving you all this time, Natasha. I've been deceiving you for ever so long, and that's the thing that really matters."

"Deceiving me?"

"Yes, deceiving you for a whole month; I had begun it before my father came back. Now the time has come for complete frankness. A month ago, before Father came back, I suddenly received an immense letter from him, and I concealed the fact from both of you. In this letter he told me plainly and simply—and mind you, in such a serious tone that I was really alarmed—that my engagement was a settled thing, that my fiancée was perfection itself, that of course I wasn't good enough for her, but that I must marry her all the same; and so I must prepare for it, put all this nonsense out of my head, and so on, and so on—we know of course what he means by nonsense. Well, that letter is what I concealed from you."

"Oh no, you didn't!" Natasha interposed. "See how he flatters himself! As a matter of fact you told us all about it at once. I remember, too, how obedient and tender you were all at once, and wouldn't leave my side, as though you were feeling guilty about something, and you told us the whole letter in fragments."

"Impossible, the chief point I'm sure I didn't tell you. Perhaps you both guessed something, but that's your affair. I didn't tell you. I kept it secret and was fearfully unhappy about it."

"I remember, Alyosha, you were continually asking my advice at that time and told me all about it, a bit at a time, of course, as though it were an imaginary case," I added, looking at Natasha.

"Of course you told us everything! Don't brag, please," she chimed in. "As if you could ever hide anything! Why, you could never have deceived anyone. Even Mavra knew all about it. Didn't you, Mavra?"

"I should say so!" retorted Mavra, popping her head in at the door. "You'd told us all about it, before three days were over. You're not one to use cunning."

"Ugh! How annoying it is to talk to you all! You're just doing all this for spite, Natasha! And you're mistaken too, Mavra. I remember, I was like a madman then. Do you remember, Mavra?"

"To be sure I do, you're like a madman now."

"No, no, I'm not talking about that at all. Do you remember, we'd no money then, and you went to pawn my silver cigar-case. And what's more, Mavra, let me tell you you're forgetting yourself in my presence. It's Natasha has let you get into such ways. Well, suppose I did tell you all about it at the time, bit by bit (I do remember it now), but you don't know the tone of it, the tone of the letter. And the tone is the main thing in the letter. That's what I'm talking about."

"Why, what was the tone?" asked Natasha.

"Listen, Natasha, you sound as though you're joking. *Don't joke* about it. I assure you that it's very important. The tone was such that I was in despair. My father had never spoken to me like that; 'Lisbon would sooner be swallowed up in an earthquake than I should fail to get my own way'—that's the sort of tone it was!"

"Well, tell us all about it. Why did you have to conceal it from me?"

"Oh, my goodness! Why, for fear of frightening you, of course! I hoped to settle it all myself. Well then, after that letter, my father came and there my troubles began. I made up my mind to answer him firmly, clearly and seriously, but somehow the moment for it never came. And he asked me no questions at all, he *is* cunning! On the contrary, he acted as though the whole thing had been settled and no argument or misunderstanding of any sort between us were possible. Do you hear, *no argument*, such *self-confidence*! And he became so affectionate, so nice

to me. It really amazed me. How clever he is, Ivan Petrovich, if only you knew! He has read everything; he knows everything; you've only to look at him once and he knows all your thoughts as though they were his own. That's probably why he has been called a Jesuit. Natasha doesn't like me to praise him. Don't be cross, Natasha. Well, so that's how it is . . . oh, by the way! He gave me some money yesterday, after all this time! Natasha, my angel! Our poverty is over now! Here, look! Whatever he took off my allowance these last six months to punish me, he made up for yesterday. See how much there is; I haven't counted it yet. Mavra, look what a lot of money, now we needn't pawn our spoons and studs!"

He brought out of his pocket a rather thick bundle of notes, about fifteen hundred rubles, and laid it on the table. Mavra looked at the money with pleasure and praised Alyosha. Natasha eagerly urged him on.

"Well then—what shall I do—I thought," Alyosha went on. "How was I to oppose him? If he'd been nasty to me and not as nice as he was I swear to you both I wouldn't have thought twice about it. I'd have told him plainly I wouldn't do what he wanted me to do, that I was grown up now, and a man, and that was the end of it. And believe me, I'd have had my way. But as it was, what could I say to him? But don't blame me. I see you seem displeased, Natasha. Why do you look at one another? I suppose you're thinking: here they've caught him at once and he hasn't a grain of firmness in him. I have, I have more firmness than you think. And the proof of it is that in spite of my position I told myself at once: 'It is my duty; I must tell my father everything, everything,' and I spoke up and told him everything and made him listen."

"But what? What did you tell him exactly?" Natasha asked anxiously.

"Why, that I don't want to marry anyone else, and that

I have made my choice already—you. That is, I didn't tell him this straight out, but I prepared him for it, and I shall tell him tomorrow. I've made up my mind. To begin with I said that to marry for money was shameful and ignoble, and that for us to consider ourselves aristocrats was simply stupid. (I spoke with perfect frankness to him, like one brother to another.) Then I explained to him that I belonged to the *tiers état*, and that the *tiers état c'est l'essentiel*, that I am proud of being just like everybody else, and that I don't want to be different from anybody; in fact, I laid all those sound ideas before him . . . I talked warmly, convincingly. I was surprised at myself. I proved to him even from his own point of view . . . I said to him in plain words—what sort of princes are we anyway? It's by birth alone, but in actual fact what is there princely about us? We're not particularly wealthy in the first place, and wealth's the main thing. The greatest prince nowadays is Rothschild. And secondly, it's a long time since anything has been heard of us in real society. The last was Uncle Semyon Valkovsky, and he was only known in Moscow, and only for squandering his last three hundred serfs, and if Father hadn't made money for himself, his grandsons would perhaps be ploughing the land themselves. There are princes like that. We've nothing to be so conceited about. In short, I told him everything that I had been brimming over with—everything, ardently and openly, in fact I even added something more. He did not even answer me, but simply began rebuking me for having given up going to Count Nainsky's, and then told me I must try and get into the good graces of Princess K., my godmother, and that if Princess K. receives me well then I shall be received everywhere, and my career is assured, and he went on and on about that, laying it on as thick as anything. All that is hinting at my having given up everyone since I've been with you, Natasha, and therefore it being due to

your influence. But he hasn't spoken about you directly so far. In fact he evidently avoids it. We're both fencing, waiting, trying to catch one another out, and you may be sure that we'll be the winners yet."

"All right, all right. But how did it end, what has he decided? That's what matters. And what a chatterbox you are, Alyosha!"

"Oh, the Lord alone knows. There's no telling what he's decided. And I'm not a chatterbox at all; I'm talking sense. He wasn't making any decisions, he only smiled at all my arguments; and such a smile, as though he were sorry for me. I know it's humiliating, but I'm not ashamed of it. 'I quite agree with you,' he said, 'but let's go to Count Nainsky's, and mind you don't say any of this there. I understand you, but they won't.' I believe he's not very well received himself; they are all angry with him about something. He seems to be disliked in society now. The count at first received me very majestically, quite haughtily, pretending he had quite forgotten I grew up in his house; he began trying to remember, he did, really. It's just that he is angry with me for ingratitude, though really there was no ingratitude on my part. It's horribly dull in his house, so I simply gave up going there. He gave my father a very casual reception too; so casual, that I can't understand how he does go there at all. I resented it terribly. Poor Father almost has to abase himself before him. I understand that it's all for my sake, but I don't want anything. I wanted to tell my father what I felt about it, afterwards, but I restrained myself. And, indeed, what would be the good? I shan't change his convictions, I shall only worry him, and he is having a bad time as it is. Well, I thought, I'll take to cunning and I'll outdo them all—I'll make the count respect me—and what do you think? I gained my object, immediately everything was changed in a single day. Count Nainsky can't make enough of me now, and that was all my doing,

only mine, it was all through my cunning, so that my father was quite astonished!"

"Listen, Alyosha, you'd better keep to the point!" Natasha cried impatiently. "I thought you would tell me something about us, and all you want to tell us is how you distinguished yourself at Count Nainsky's. 'What do I care about that count of yours?'"

"What do you care! Do you hear, Ivan Petrovich, do you hear what she says! But that's the most important thing of all! You'll see it yourself, it will all be explained in the end. Only let me tell you about it. And then (why not be frank about it?) I'll tell you what, Natasha, and you too, Ivan Petrovich, perhaps I really am very, very injudicious sometimes, well, let us say even stupid (for I know it is so at times). But in this case, I assure you, I showed a great deal of cunning . . . in fact . . . of cleverness, so that I thought you'd be quite pleased that I'm not always so . . . unwise."

"Oh no, Alyosha, what are you saying! Oh, you, my darling!"

Natasha couldn't bear Alyosha to be considered stupid. How often she was angry with me, though she said nothing, when I proved to Alyosha without ceremony that he had done something stupid; it was a sore spot in her heart. She could not bear to see Alyosha humiliated, and probably felt it the more because she herself was aware of his limitations. But she never gave him an inkling of her opinion for fear of wounding him. However he was particularly sensitive on this point, and always divined her secret feelings. Natasha saw this and it grieved her, and she at once tried to flatter and caress him. That is why his words raised painful echoes in her heart now.

"Nonsense, Alyosha, you're only frivolous. You're not at all like that," she added. "Why do you humble yourself?"

"Well, so much the better. Now then, let me finish my story. Father was quite angry with me after the reception at the count's. I thought, 'wait a bit.' We were on our way to the princess's then. I heard long ago that she was so old that she was almost doting, and deaf besides, and awfully fond of little dogs. She has a whole pack of them, and she adores them. In spite of all that she is terribly influential in society, so that even Count Nainsky, *le superbe*, does *l'antichambre* to her. So I devised a plan of all my future actions on the way there. And what do you think I built it all on? Why, on the fact that dogs always like me, yes, really. I have noticed it. It's either because there's some magnetism in me, or else it's because I'm fond of all animals. I don't know, only dogs do like me, and that's all there is to it. And, by the way, talking of magnetism, I haven't told you yet, Natasha, we called up spirits the other day, I was at a spiritualist's. It's awfully curious, Ivan Petrovich; it really impressed me. I called up Julius Caesar."

"My goodness! What did you want with Julius Caesar?" cried Natasha, going off into peals of laughter. "That's the last straw!"

"Why not . . . as though I were such a . . . why shouldn't I call up Julius Caesar? What harm will it do him? Now she's laughing!"

"Of course it wouldn't harm him . . . oh, you dear! Well, what did Julius Caesar say to you?"

"Oh, he didn't say anything. I simply held the pencil, and the pencil moved over the paper and wrote of itself. They said it was Julius Caesar writing. I don't believe in it."

"But what did he write, then?"

"Why, he wrote something like the 'dip it in' in Gogol. Oh, do stop laughing!"

"Come, tell us about the princess, then."

"But you keep interrupting me. We arrived at the

princess's and I began my making love to Mimi. Mimi is a most disgusting, horrid old dog, obstinate, too, and fond of biting. The princess dotes on her, she simply worships her; I believe they are the same age. I began by feeding Mimi with sweets, and in about ten minutes I had taught her to shake hands, which they had never been able to teach her before. The princess was simply ecstatic, she almost wept with joy. 'Mimi! Mimi! Mimi is shaking hands!' Someone came in. 'Mimi shakes hands, my godson here has taught her.' Count Nainsky arrived. 'Mimi shakes hands!' She looked at me almost with tears of tenderness. She's an awfully nice old lady; I even felt sorry for her. But I didn't let the chance slip and I flattered her again. She has a snuff-box with her own portrait on it, painted when she was a bride, sixty years ago or so. Well, she dropped her snuff-box. I picked it up and exclaimed as if I didn't know: '*Quelle charmante peinture!* It's a perfect beauty!' Well, that melted her completely. She talked to me of this and that; asked me where I had studied, what friends I had, said what nice hair I had, and so on and so on. To follow it up I made her laugh by telling her a piece of scandal. She likes that sort of thing; she only shook her finger at me, but she nevertheless laughed a great deal. When she let me go, she kissed me and blessed me, and insisted I should come and amuse her every day. The count pressed my hand; his eyes all but dripped oil. And as for Father, though he's the kindest, and noblest, and most honourable man in the world, he almost cried with joy on the way home—believe it or not. He hugged me, and became mysteriously confidential about a career, connections, marriages, money; I couldn't understand a lot of it. It was then he gave me the money. That was yesterday. Tomorrow I'm to go to the princess's again. But still, my father's a very honourable man—don't you imagine anything—even though he does try to draw me away from you, Natasha, it's simply because

he's dazzled and he wants Katya's millions, and you haven't any; and he wants them for my sake alone, and he is unjust to you merely through lack of knowledge. For what father doesn't wish his son's happiness? It's not his fault that he is used to estimating happiness in millions. They're all like that. One must look at him from that standpoint only, you know, and then one can see at once that he's right. I've hurried to you purposely, Natasha, to assure you of this, for I know you're prejudiced against him, and of course that's not your fault. I don't blame you for it."

"Then all that has happened is that you've made yourself a position at the princess's. Is that all your cunning amounts to?" asked Natasha.

"Not at all. I should say not! That's only the beginning. I only told you about the princess because, you understand, through her I shall get a hold over my father; but my real story hasn't begun yet."

"Well, tell it then!"

"I've had another adventure this morning, and a very strange one too. I haven't got over it yet," Alyosha went on. "I must point out to you that, although it's all settled about our engagement between my father and the countess, there's been no formal announcement at all so far, so we can break it off at any moment without a scandal or anything. Count Nainsky's the only person who knows about it, but he's looked upon as our relation and benefactor. What's more, though I've got to know Katya very well this last fortnight, till this very evening I've never said a word to her about the future, that is, about marriage or . . . well, love. Besides, we're supposed to ask Princess K.'s consent first, because she's expected to provide us with her patronage and showers of gold. The world will say what she says. She has such connections. . . . And what they want more than anything is to push me forward in society. But it's the countess, Katya's stepmother, who insists most strongly on this arrangement. The point

is that perhaps the princess won't receive her because of her doings abroad, and if the princess won't receive her, then the others won't either, perhaps. So my engagement to Katya is a good opportunity for her. And therefore the countess, who used to be against the engagement, was highly delighted at my success with the princess today; but that's beside the point. What matters is this. I've known Katerina Fyodorovna since last year, but I was a mere boy, and I didn't understand anything, and so I saw nothing in her then...."

"It's just that you loved me better then," Natasha broke in, "that's why you saw nothing in her; and now...."

"Don't say a word, Natasha!" cried Alyosha, hotly. "You are quite mistaken, and you are insulting me. I won't even answer you; listen, and you'll see. Ah, if only you knew Katya! If only you knew what a tender, clear, dove-like soul she has! But you will know. Only let me finish. A fortnight ago, when my father took me to see Katya as soon as they had arrived, I began to study her intently. I noticed she watched me too. That quite captivated my curiosity, to say nothing of my having a special intention of getting to know her better, which I had had ever since I got that letter from my father, that impressed me so much. I'm not going to say anything about her. I'm not going to praise her. I'll only say one thing. She's a striking contrast to all her circle. She has such an original nature, such a strong and truthful soul, strong in its very purity and truthfulness, that I'm simply a boy beside her, like a younger brother, though she is only seventeen. Another thing I noticed, there's a great deal of sadness about her, a sort of mystery; she is not talkative; at home she's mostly silent as though afraid to speak. She seems to be brooding over something. I think she is afraid of my father. She doesn't like her stepmother—I have noticed it; it's the countess herself who, for some object of her own, spreads the story that her stepdaughter

adores her. That's all false. Katya simply obeys her without question, and it seems as though there's some agreement between them about it. Four days ago, after all my observations, I made up my mind to carry out my intention, and this evening I did. My plan was to tell Katya everything, to confess everything, get her on our side, and so put an end to it all...."

"What do you mean? Tell her what, confess what?" Natasha asked, uneasily.

"Everything, absolutely everything," answered Alyosha, "and I thank the Lord for having inspired me with the thought, but listen, listen! Four days ago I made up my mind to keep away from you both and end it all by myself. If I had been with you I should have been hesitating all the time. I should have been listening to you, and would never have dared do it. But when I remained alone, and put myself in the position in which I was bound to repeat to myself every minute that I ought to end it, that I *must* end it, I screwed up my courage and—have ended it! I meant to come back to you with the matter settled and I have!"

"What then? What? What has happened? Tell me quickly."

"It's very simple! I approached her frankly, boldly and honestly. But I must first tell you of something else that happened just before, and struck me very much. A minute before we set off Father received a letter. I was just going into his study and stopped in the doorway. He did not see me. The letter had such an extraordinary effect on him that he talked to himself, uttered some exclamations, walked about the room quite beside himself, and suddenly burst out laughing—the letter in his hand. I was quite afraid to go in, and waited for a minute. Father was so delighted about something, so delighted; he spoke to me rather queerly; then suddenly broke off and told me to get ready at once, though it was not time for

us to go yet. They had no one there today, only us two, and you were mistaken, Natasha, in thinking it was a party. You were told wrong."

"Oh, do keep to the point, Alyosha, please; tell me, how you told Katya."

"Luckily I was left alone with her for two hours. I simply told her that though they wanted to make a match between us, our marriage was impossible, that I had a great affection for her in my heart, and that she alone could save me. Then I confessed everything. Just fancy, she knew nothing at all about our story, about you and me, Natasha. If only you could have seen how touched she was; she was even alarmed at first. She turned quite white. I told her our whole story; how for my sake you'd abandoned your home; how we'd been living together, how harassed we were now, how afraid of everything, and that now we were appealing to her (I spoke in your name too, Natasha), to take our side, and tell her stepmother straight out that she wouldn't marry me; that in this lay our only salvation, and that we had nothing to hope for from anyone else. She listened with such interest, such sympathy. What eyes she had at that moment! Her whole soul was in them. Her eyes are perfectly blue, you know. She thanked me for not doubting her, and promised to do all she could to help us. Then she began asking about you; said she very much wanted to know you, asked me to tell you that she already loved you like a sister, and that she hoped you would love her like a sister too. And when she heard that I had not seen you for five days she at once began urging me to go to you."

Natasha was touched.

"And you could waste all this time telling us of your triumphs with some deaf princess! Oh, Alyosha! Alyosha!" she exclaimed, looking at him reproachfully. "Well, tell me about Katya, was she happy, cheerful, when she said good-bye to you?"

"Yes, she was glad that she was able to do something generous, but she was crying. For she loves me too, Natasha! She confessed that she was beginning to love me; that she sees hardly anyone, and that she was attracted by me long ago. She noticed me particularly because she sees cunning and deception all round her, and I seemed to her a sincere and honest person. She stood up and said: 'Well, God be with you, Alexei Petrovich. And I was thinking. . . .' She did not finish but burst out crying and left the room. We decided that tomorrow she would tell her stepmother that she won't have me, and that I too should tell my father everything tomorrow and speak out boldly and firmly. She reproached me for not having told him before, saying that an honourable man ought not to be afraid of anything. She is such a noble-hearted girl. She doesn't like my father either. She says he's cunning and mercenary. I defended him; she didn't believe me. If I don't succeed tomorrow with my father (and she feels convinced I shan't) then she agrees with me that I should get Princess K. to support me. Then no one would dare to oppose it. We promised to be like brother and sister to each other. Oh, if only you knew her story too, how unhappy she is, with what aversion she looks on her life with her stepmother, on all her surroundings. She didn't tell me directly, as though she were afraid even of me, but I guessed it from some of the things she said. Natasha, darling! How delighted she would be with you if she saw you! And what a kind heart she has! One is so at home with her! You are born to be sisters and to love one another. I've been thinking about it all the time. And really I should like to bring you two together, and stand by admiring you. Don't imagine anything, Natasha, little one, and let me talk about her. It's to you more than anyone else that I want to talk about her and to her about you. You know I love you more than anyone, more than her. . . . You're everything to me!"

Natasha looked at him in silence, tenderly and yet sadly. His words seemed to caress her, but were a torment to her too.

"And I saw how splendid Katya was quite a long time ago, at least a fortnight," he went on. "I've been going to see them every evening, you see. I'd come back home and think and think of you both, and compare you."

"Which of us came off best?" asked Natasha, smiling.

"Sometimes you and sometimes she. But you were always the best in the long run. On the other hand, when I talk to her I always feel I become better somehow, wiser, and somehow finer. But tomorrow, tomorrow will settle everything!"

"And aren't you sorry for her? She loves you, doesn't she? You say you've noticed it yourself."

"Yes, I am sorry, Natasha! But we'll all three love one another, and then...."

"And then good-bye!" Natasha brought out quietly, as though to herself.

Alyosha looked puzzled.

But our conversation was suddenly interrupted in the most unexpected way. In the kitchen, which was at the same time the hall, we heard a slight noise as though someone had come in. A minute later Mavra opened the door and beckoned to Alyosha furtively. We all turned to her.

"Someone's asking for you, come out, will you," she said in a mysterious voice.

"Who can be asking for me now?" said Alyosha, looking at us in bewilderment. "I'll go and see."

His father's liveried servant stood in the kitchen. It appeared that the prince had stopped his carriage at Natasha's lodging on his way home, and had sent up to inquire whether Alyosha were there. Explaining this the footman went away at once.

"Strange! This has never happened before," said

Alyosha glancing at us in confusion. "What does it mean?"

Natasha gave him a worried look. Suddenly Mavra opened the door again.

"Here's the prince himself!" she said in a hurried whisper, and at once withdrew.

Natasha turned pale and got up from her seat. Suddenly her eyes kindled. She stood leaning a little on the table, and looked in agitation towards the door, by which the uninvited visitor would enter.

"Natasha, don't be afraid! You're with me. I won't let you be insulted," whispered Alyosha, embarrassed but unshaken. The door opened, and Prince Valkovsky in person appeared on the threshold.

CHAPTER II

He took us all in in a rapid, searching glance. It was impossible to guess from this glance whether he had come as a friend or as an enemy. But let me describe his appearance minutely. He impressed me particularly that evening.

It wasn't the first time I saw him. He was a man of about forty-five, not more, with regular and strikingly handsome features, the expression of which changed according to circumstances; but it changed abruptly, completely, with extraordinary rapidity, passing from the most agreeable to the most surly or displeased, as though some spring was suddenly touched. The regular oval of his somewhat olive face, his perfect teeth, his small, thinnish, beautifully chiselled lips, his rather long straight nose, his high forehead, on which no wrinkle could be discerned, his rather large grey eyes—all this made him almost perfectly handsome, and yet his face was not a pleasant one. The face repelled one, and all because its

expression was somehow not its own, but always borrowed, artificial, deliberate; and a blind conviction grew upon you that you would never fathom its real expression. Studying his face more intently you began to suspect behind the ever present mask something spiteful, cunning, and intensely egoistic. Your attention was particularly caught by his grey eyes, which seemed fine and frank. They alone seemed unable to submit to his will entirely. He might want to look kind and friendly, but the light in his eyes was as it were twofold, and in the kind friendly radiance there were flashes that were cruel, mistrustful, searching and spiteful.... He was rather tall, of an elegant, slim build, and looked much younger than his age. His soft brown hair had scarcely yet begun to turn grey. His ears, his hands and his feet were remarkably fine. It was pre-eminently the beauty of race. He was dressed with refined elegance and freshness but with some affectation of youth, which suited him, however. He looked like Alyosha's elder brother. At any rate no one would have taken him for the father of so grown-up a son.

He went straight up to Natasha and said, looking at her steadily:

"My calling upon you at such an hour, and unannounced, is strange, and against all accepted rules. But I trust you will believe that I can at least recognize the eccentricity of my behaviour. I know, too, with whom I have to deal; I know that you are wise and magnanimous. Grant me ten minutes, and I hope that you will understand me and justify it."

He said all this courteously but with force, and, as it were, insistence.

"Won't you sit down," Natasha said, still confused and somewhat frightened.

He made a slight bow and sat down.

"First of all allow me to say a word or two to him," he said, indicating his son. "As soon as you had gone

away, Alyosha, without waiting for me or even taking leave of us, the countess was informed that Katerina Fyodorovna was ill. She was on the point of hastening to her, but Katerina Fyodorovna herself suddenly came in distressed and greatly agitated. She told us, forthwith, that she could not marry you. She said, too, that she would take the veil, that you had asked for her help, and had confessed to her that you loved Natalya Nikolayevna. This extraordinary declaration on the part of Katerina Fyodorovna, especially at such a moment, was of course provoked by the extreme strangeness of your conversation with her. She was almost beside herself. You can understand how shocked and alarmed I was. As I drove past just now I noticed a light in your window," he went on, addressing Natasha, "then an idea which had been haunting me for a long time gained full possession of me, so that I could not resist my first impulse, and came in to see you. With what object? I will tell you directly, but I beg you beforehand not to be surprised at a certain abruptness in my explanation. It is all so sudden...."

"I hope I shall understand and ... appreciate correctly what you are about to tell me," answered Natasha, faltering.

The prince scrutinized her intently as though he were in a hurry to size her up.

"Your penetration is what I am relying on," he went on, "and if I ventured to come to you now, it was just because I knew with whom I should have to deal. I have known you for a long time now, although I was at one time so unfair to you and did you injustice. Hear me out. You know that between me and your father there are disagreements of long standing. I am not trying to justify myself; perhaps I have been more to blame in my treatment of him than I had supposed till now. But if so, I myself was deceived. I am suspicious, and I admit it. I am disposed to suspect evil rather than good; an unhappy

trait, characteristic of a cold heart. But it is not my habit to conceal my failings. I believed in all the slander, and when you left your parents I was horrified for Alyosha. But then I did not know you. The information I have gathered little by little has completely reassured me. I have watched you, studied you, and am at last convinced that my suspicions were groundless. I know now that you have quarrelled with your family; I know, too, that your father is absolutely against your marriage with my son, and the mere fact that, having such an influence, such power, one may say, over Alyosha, you have not hitherto taken advantage of that power to force him to marry you—that alone says volumes for you. And yet, I shall make my confession complete, I was firmly resolved at that time to oppose any possibility of your marriage with my son. I know I am expressing myself too straightforwardly, but at this moment straightforwardness on my part is what is most needed; you will agree with this yourself when you have heard me to the end. Shortly after you left your home I went away from Petersburg, but by then I had no further fears for Alyosha. I relied on your noble pride. I knew that you yourself did not want this marriage before our family dissensions were over, that you were unwilling to destroy the good understanding between Alyosha and me—for I should never have forgiven his marriage with you—that you were unwilling, too, to have it said of you that you were trying to catch a prince for a husband, and to become connected with our family. On the contrary, you even showed a certain scorn for us, and were perhaps waiting for the moment when I should come to beg you to do us the honour of accepting my son's hand. Yet I obstinately remained your ill-wisher. I am not going to justify myself, but I will not conceal my reasons. Here they are: you have neither wealth nor position. Though I do have certain holdings, we need more; our family is on the decline. We need

money and connections. Though Countess Zinaida Fyodorovna's stepdaughter has no connections, she is very wealthy. If we delayed, suitors would turn up and carry her off. A chance like that was not to be missed, and although Alyosha is rather young, I decided to make a match for him. You see I am concealing nothing. You may look with scorn on a father who himself admits that from prejudice and mercenary motives he urged his son to an evil action: for to desert a generous-hearted girl who has sacrificed everything for him, and whom he owes so much, is an evil action. But I am not defending myself. My second reason for my son's proposed marriage was that the young lady was highly deserving of love and respect. She is handsome, excellently brought up, has a charming disposition, and is very intelligent, though in many ways still a child. Alyosha has no strength of character, he is thoughtless, extremely injudicious, and at two-and-twenty is a perfect child, and perhaps he has but one virtue—a good heart—a dangerous virtue indeed with his other failings. I have noticed for a long time that my influence over him was beginning to wane; the impulsiveness and enthusiasm of youth are taking a strong hold on him, and are even getting the upper hand over some real duties. I love him too fondly perhaps; and I am beginning to realize that I am no longer a sufficient guide for him. And yet he must always be under some good influence. He has a submissive nature, weak and loving, one which prefers to love and obey rather than to command. He will be like that all his life. You can imagine how delighted I was at finding in Katerina Fyodorovna the ideal girl I should have desired for my son's wife. But my joy came too late: he was already under the sway of another influence that nothing could shake—yours. I have been watching him closely ever since I returned to Petersburg a month ago, and I notice with surprise a distinct change for the better in him. His ir-

responsibility and childishness are scarcely altered; but certain generous feelings have taken strong root in him; he is beginning to take an interest not only in playthings, but in what is lofty, noble and genuine. His ideas are queer, unstable, sometimes absurd, but his desires, his impulses, his heart—are finer, and that is the foundation of everything; and all that is best in him undoubtedly comes from you. You have remodelled him. I will confess the idea did occur to me then that you, rather than anyone, might secure his happiness. But I dismissed that idea, I did not wish to entertain it. I felt I had to draw him away from you at any cost. I began to act, and thought I had gained my object. Only an hour ago I thought that victory was mine. But what has just happened at the countess's has upset all my calculations, and what struck me most of all was something unexpected; the earnestness and constancy of Alyosha's devotion to you, the persistence and vitality of that devotion—which seemed strange in him. I repeat, you have remodelled him completely. I suddenly saw that the change in him had gone even further than I had supposed. He exhibited today a sudden proof of a wisdom which I had hardly suspected in him, and at the same time an extraordinary insight and subtlety of feeling. He chose the surest way of extricating himself from what he felt to be a difficult position. He touched and stirred the noblest chords in the human heart—the power of forgiving and repaying good for evil. He surrendered himself into the hands of the being he was injuring, and, what was more, appealed to her for sympathy and help. He roused all the pride of the woman who already loved him by openly telling her she had a rival, and secured at the same time her sympathy for her rival, and forgiveness and the promise of disinterested, sisterly affection for himself. To venture into an explanation like that without inflicting pain is something that even the subtlest and the wisest are not always capable

of doing, and it can only be done by young hearts that are pure, unsoiled and well guided. I am sure, Natalya Nikolayevna, that you took no part by word or suggestion in what he did today. You have perhaps only just heard of it from him. I am not mistaken, am I?"

"You are not mistaken," Natasha assented. Her face was glowing, and her eyes shone with a strange light as though of inspiration. Prince Valkovsky's eloquence was beginning to produce its effect. "I haven't seen Alyosha for five days," she added. "He thought of all this himself and carried it all out himself."

"Exactly," confirmed the prince, "but, in spite of that, all this surprising insight, all this decision and recognition of duty, this creditable manliness, in fact, is all the result of your influence on him. I was reflecting on it on my way home, I understood it all thoroughly, and suddenly I felt able to reach a decision. The proposed match with the countess's stepdaughter is broken off, and cannot be renewed; but even if it could it would never come to pass. Well—I myself have become convinced that you are the only woman that can make him happy, that you are his true guide, that you have already laid the foundations of his future happiness! I have concealed nothing from you and I am concealing nothing now; I love success, money, eminence, and even ranks in the service; I quite realize that a great deal of this is mere conventions, but I love these conventions, and am absolutely disinclined to run counter to them. But there are circumstances when other considerations have to come in, when the common measure cannot be applied.... Besides, I love my son dearly. In short, I have come to the conclusion that Alyosha must not be parted from you, because without you he will be lost. And must I confess it? I have perhaps arrived at this conclusion a whole month ago, and only now I realize that the conclusion was the right one. Of course, I might have called on you tomorrow to tell you

all this, instead of disturbing you at midnight. But my present impatience will show you, perhaps, how warmly, and what is more important, how sincerely, I feel in the matter. I am not a boy, and I could not at my age risk taking a step that had not been carefully weighed by me. Everything had been thought over and decided before I came here. But I feel that it will take me a long time to convince you of my sincerity. . . . But let us come to the point! Need I explain now why I came here? I came to do my duty to you, and solemnly, with the deepest respect, I beg you to do my son the honour of accepting his hand in marriage. Oh, do not think that I have come like a wrathful father, who has resolved at last to forgive his children and graciously consent to their happiness. No! No! You do me an injustice if you suppose I have any such idea. Do not imagine either that I was certain of your consent beforehand, relying on the sacrifices you have made for my son; no again! I would not hesitate to declare aloud that he does not deserve you, and (he is candid and good) he will admit it himself. But that is not all. It is not only this that has brought me here at such an hour. . . . I have come here (and he rose from his seat respectfully and with a certain solemnity), I have come here to become your friend! I know I have no right whatever to this, quite the contrary! But—allow me to earn the right! Allow me to hope!”

He awaited her reply, standing before her in an attitude of respect. I was watching him intently all the time he was speaking. He noticed it.

He made his speech coldly, with a certain claim to eloquence, and in parts with a certain nonchalance. The tone of his whole speech sounded incongruous at times with the impulse that had brought him to us at an hour so inappropriate for a first visit, especially with relations being what they were. Some of his expressions were obviously elaborated, and in some parts of his long speech

—strange in its very length—he seemed to be artificially assuming the air of an eccentric man struggling to conceal an overwhelming feeling under a show of humour, carelessness and jest. But all this only occurred to me afterwards; at the time the effect was different. He uttered the last words so sincerely, with so much feeling, with such an air of the most genuine respect for Natasha, that it conquered us all. There was actually the glimmer of a tear on his eyelashes. Natasha's generous heart was completely won. She, too, got up, and deeply moved, held out her hand to him without a word. He took it and kissed it with tenderness and emotion. Alyosha was beside himself with rapture.

"What did I tell you, Natasha?" he cried. "You wouldn't believe me. You wouldn't believe that he was the noblest man in the world! Now you see, you see for yourself!"

He rushed to his father, and hugged him warmly. The latter responded as warmly, but hastened to cut short the touching scene, evidently finding this display of feeling embarrassing.

"Enough," he said, and took his hat. "I must go. I asked you to give me ten minutes and I have been here a whole hour," he added, smiling. "But I leave you with impatient eagerness to see you again as soon as possible. Will you allow me to visit you often?"

"Yes, yes," answered Natasha, "as often as you can. I want to . . . grow to love you . . . as soon as possible. . . ." she added in embarrassment.

"How sincere you are, how truthful," said the prince, smiling at her words. "You won't dissemble even for the sake of being merely polite. But your sincerity is more precious than all this artificial politeness. Yes! I realize that it will take me a long, long time to deserve your love."

"No, don't praise me. Enough," Natasha whispered in confusion. How lovely she was at that moment!

"So be it," Prince Valkovsky concluded. "But just a

word or two about immediate matters. You cannot imagine how wretched I am! Do you know I can't be with you tomorrow—neither tomorrow nor the day after. I received a letter this evening of such importance to me (requiring my presence on business at once) that I cannot possibly ignore it. I am leaving Petersburg tomorrow morning. Please do not imagine that I called on you at such a late hour because I should have no time tomorrow or the day after. Of course you don't think so, but that is just an instance of my suspicious nature. Why should I fancy that you must necessarily think so? Yes, this mistrustfulness of mine has often done me harm in my life, and my whole quarrel with your family is perhaps just the fault of my unfortunate character! It's Tuesday today. Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday I shall not be in Petersburg. I hope to return on Saturday for certain; and I will be with you the same day. Tell me, may I come to you for the whole evening?"

"Of course, of course!" cried Natasha. "On Saturday evening I shall be expecting you! I shall be expecting you impatiently!"

"And I, I feel happy indeed! I shall be getting to know you better and better! But . . . I must go! I cannot go without shaking hands with you though," he added, turning suddenly to me. "Forgive me! We are all talking so disconnectedly. I have had the pleasure of meeting you on several occasions, and once, indeed, we were introduced. I cannot take my leave without telling you how glad I should be to renew our acquaintance."

"We have met, it's true," I answered, taking his hand. "But I must confess I don't remember that we became acquainted."

"At Prince R.'s, last year."

"I beg your pardon. I've forgotten. But I assure you this time I shall not forget. This evening will always remain in my memory."

"Yes, you are right. I feel the same. I have long known that you have been a good and true friend to Natalya Nikolayevna and my son, I hope you three will admit me as a fourth. Will you?" he added, addressing Natasha.

"Yes, he is our true friend, and we must all be together," Natasha answered with deep feeling. Poor girl! She fairly glowed with delight because the prince had not overlooked me. How she loved me!

"I have met many admirers of your talent," Prince Valkovsky went on. "And I know two of the most sincere—the countess, my dearest friend, and her stepdaughter, Katerina Fyodorovna Filimonova. They would be delighted to know you personally. Allow me to hope that you will not refuse me the pleasure of presenting you to these ladies."

"I feel highly flattered, though now I see so few people...."

"But you will give me your address, won't you? Where do you live? I shall do myself the pleasure...."

"I do not receive visitors, prince. At least not at present."

"But, though I have not deserved to be an exception.... I...."

"Certainly, since you insist I shall be delighted. I live at—Street, in Klugen's Buildings."

"Klugen's Buildings!" he cried with a look of astonishment. "What! Have you ... lived there long?"

"No, not long," I answered, my curiosity involuntarily aroused. "I live at No. 44."

"Forty-four? You are living ... alone?"

"Quite alone."

"Oh yes? I ask you because I think I know the house. So much the better ... I will certainly come and see you, certainly! There are many problems I have to discuss with you and I'm hoping you can do something for me. You can oblige me in many ways. You see I am beginning straight

off by asking you a favour. But good-bye! Your hand again!"

He shook my hand and Alyosha's, kissed Natasha's hand again and went out without suggesting that Alyosha should follow him.

The three of us felt utterly confused. It had all happened so unexpectedly, so casually. We all felt that in one instant everything had changed, and that something new and unknown was beginning. Alyosha silently sat beside Natasha and softly kissed her hand. From time to time he glanced up into her face as though to see what she would say.

"Alyosha, darling, go and see Katerina Fyodorovna tomorrow," she brought out at last.

"I was thinking of that myself," he said, "I shall certainly go."

"But perhaps it will be painful for her to see you. What's to be done?"

"I don't know, dear. I thought of that, too. I'll think it over ... see how it is ... then I'll decide. Well, Natasha, everything is changed for us now, isn't it?" Alyosha said, unable to contain himself.

She smiled and gave him a long, tender look.

"And how tactful he is. He saw how poor your lodging was and not a word...."

"Of what?"

"Why ... of your moving ... or anything," he added reddening.

"Nonsense, Alyosha, why ever should he?"

"That's just what I say. He has such delicacy. And how he praised you! I told you so ... I told you. Yes, he's capable of understanding and feeling anything! But he talked of me as though I were a child; they all treat me like that. But I suppose that's what I really am."

"You are a child, but you're sharper than any of us. You're good, Alyosha!"

"And he said that my good heart did me harm. What did he mean? I don't understand. But I say, Natasha, oughtn't I to hurry to him now? I'll be with you as soon as it's light tomorrow."

"Yes, go, darling, go. It's good of you to think of it. And be sure to show yourself to him, do you hear? And come tomorrow as early as you can. You won't run away from me for five days now, will you?" she added slyly, her eyes caressing him.

We were all in a state of quiet, unruffled joy.

"Are you coming with me, Vanya?" cried Alyosha on his way out.

"No, he'll stay a little. I've something more to say to you, Vanya. Mind, quite early tomorrow."

"Quite early. Good night, Mavra."

Mavra was terribly excited. She had listened to all the prince said, she had overheard it all, but there was much she had not understood. She was longing to ask questions, and make surmises. But meantime she looked serious, and even proud. She, too, guessed that much was changed.

We remained alone. Natasha took my hand, and for some time was silent, as though seeking for something to say.

"I'm tired," she said at last in a weak voice. "Listen, you will be going to them tomorrow, won't you?"

"Of course."

"Tell Mamma, but don't speak to *him*."

"I never speak of you to him, anyway."

"Mind you don't; he'll find out without that. But note what he says. How he takes it. Oh God, Vanya, will he really curse me for this marriage? No, it's not possible!"

"The prince will have to settle the whole matter," I took up hurriedly. "He must make up the quarrel with your father and then everything will be all right."

"My God! If that could only be! If that could only be!" she cried out imploringly.

"Don't worry, Natasha, everything will come out right. It certainly looks like it."

She looked at me intently.

"Vanya, what do you think of the prince?"

"If he was sincere in what he said, then to my thinking he's quite an honourable man."

"If he was sincere? What does that mean? Surely he couldn't have been speaking insincerely?"

"That's what I think too," I answered. "Then some such idea did occur to her," I thought. "That's strange!"

"You kept looking at him . . . so intently. . . ."

"Yes, he seemed rather strange."

"I thought so too. He kept on talking so . . . my dear, I'm tired. You know, you'd better be going home too. And come tomorrow as early as you can after seeing them. And one other thing: it wasn't rude of me to say that I wanted to grow to love him, was it?"

"No, why rude?"

"And not . . . stupid? You see it was as much as to say that so far I didn't love him."

"On the contrary, it was beautiful, simple, spontaneous. You looked so lovely at that moment! He's stupid if he doesn't understand that with his aristocratic breeding!"

"You seem to be angry with him, Vanya. But how horrid I am, how suspicious, and vain! Don't laugh at me; I hide nothing from you, you know. Ah, Vanya, my dearest friend! If I am unhappy again, if sorrow comes again you'll be here beside me, I know; perhaps you'll be the only one! How can I repay you for everything! Don't curse me ever, Vanya!"

Returning home, I undressed at once and went to bed. My room was as dark and damp as a cellar. Many strange thoughts and sensations crowded in on me, and it was long before I could get to sleep.

But how a certain man must have been laughing at us just then as he fell asleep in his comfortable bed—that is, if he thought us worth laughing at! Probably he didn't!

CHAPTER III

At about ten next morning as I was coming out of my lodgings, hurrying off to the Ikhmenevs in Vasilyevsky Island, and meaning to go from them to Natasha, I suddenly came upon my visitor of yesterday, Smith's granddaughter, at the door. She had come to see me. I don't know why, but I remember I was awfully pleased to see her. I had hardly had time to get a good look at her the day before, and by daylight she surprised me even more. And, indeed, it would be difficult to find a creature stranger or more original—in appearance, at least. Small of stature, with flashing black eyes, which looked somehow foreign, with a mass of thick, dishevelled black hair, and a mute, fixed, enigmatic gaze, she would have attracted the notice of anyone who passed her in the street. The expression in her eyes was particularly striking! There was a light of intellect in them, and at the same time an inquisitorial mistrust, even suspicion. Her dirty old frock looked even more hopelessly tattered by daylight. She seemed to me to be suffering from some wasting, chronic disease that was gradually and relentlessly destroying her. Her pale, thin face had an unnatural, sallow, bilious tinge. But all in all—in spite of all the ugliness of poverty and illness—she was rather comely. Her eyebrows were strongly marked, thin and beautiful; but her best features were her broad, rather low brow and her lips, exquisitely formed with a peculiarly proud, bold line, but pale and barely tinged with colour.

"Ah, it's you again!" I cried. "Well, I thought you'd come. Step in!"

She came in, walking through the doorway slowly just as she did the day before, glancing about her mistrustfully. She looked carefully round the room where her grandfather had lived, as though noting how far it had been changed by another inmate.

"Well, like grandfather like granddaughter," I thought. "Is she insane, perhaps?"

She remained silent; I waited.

"The books!" she whispered at last, dropping her eyes.

"Oh yes, your books; here they are, take them! I've been keeping them purposely for you."

She looked at me inquisitively, and her mouth twisted strangely as if she would venture on a mistrustful smile. But the impulse to smile passed and was replaced at once by the same severe and enigmatic expression.

"Why, did Grandfather speak to you about me?" she asked, scanning me ironically from head to foot.

"No, he didn't speak about you, but. . . ."

"Then how did you know I should come? Who told you?" she asked, quickly interrupting me.

"Because I thought your grandfather couldn't have lived alone, abandoned by everyone. He was so old and feeble; and so I supposed someone must have been looking after him. . . . Here are your books, take them. Are they your lesson-books?"

"No."

"What do you want with them, then?"

"Grandfather taught me when I used to come and see him. . . ."

"And did you stop coming then?"

"Afterwards . . . I didn't come. I fell ill," she added, as though defending herself.

"Tell me, have you a home, a father and mother?"

She frowned suddenly and looked at me with something like alarm. Then she dropped her eyes, turned in silence and walked softly out of the room without deigning to

reply, just as she had done the day before. I looked after her in amazement. But she paused in the doorway.

"What did he die of?" she asked me abruptly, turning slightly towards me with exactly the same movement and gesture as the day before, when she had asked after Azorka, stopping on her way out with her face to the door.

I went up to her and told her what I knew of it. She listened silently and with curiosity, her head bowed and her back turned to me. I told her, too, how the old man had mentioned Sixth Street as he was dying.

"It made me guess," I added, "that someone dear to him must be living there, and that's why I expected someone to come and inquire after him. He must have loved you, since he thought of you at the last moment."

"No," she whispered, almost unconsciously it seemed; "he didn't love me."

She was deeply stirred. As I told my story I would bend down and look into her face. I noticed that she was making a tremendous effort to suppress her emotion, as though too proud to let me see it. She turned paler and paler and bit her lower lip. But what astonished me particularly was the strange thumping of her heart. It throbbed louder and louder, so that I could hear it two or three paces off, as though it were an aneurism. I thought she would suddenly burst into tears as she had done the day before; but she controlled herself.

"And where is the fence?"

"What fence?"

"That he died under."

"I will show you . . . when we go out. But, tell me, what is your name?"

"Don't. . . ."

"Don't—what?"

"Don't . . . nothing . . . I've no name," she brought out jerkily, as though annoyed, and she moved to go away. I stopped her.

"Wait a minute, you queer child! Why, I only want to help you. I've been feeling sorry for you since yesterday when I saw you crying in the corner on the stairs. I can't bear to think of it. Besides, your grandfather died in my arms, and no doubt he was thinking of you when he mentioned Sixth Street, so it's almost as if he left you in my care. He comes to me in dreams.... Here, I've kept these books for you, but you're such a wild little thing, you seem to be afraid of me. You must be very poor and an orphan, perhaps living among strangers; is that it?"

I did my utmost to conciliate her, and even I myself could not tell why she appealed to me so strongly. There was something besides mere pity in my feeling for her. Whether it was the mysteriousness of the whole situation, the impression made on me by Smith, or my own fantastic mood—I can't say; but something drew me irresistibly to her. My words seemed to touch her. She bent on me a strange look, not severe now, but soft and long, then looked down again as though pondering.

"Yelena," she whispered suddenly, and very softly.

"Is that your name: Yelena?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, will you come and see me?"

"I can't. I don't know. I will," she whispered, as though pondering and struggling with herself.

At that moment a clock struck somewhere.

She started, and with an indescribable look of heart-sick anguish she whispered:

"What time was that?"

"It must have been half past ten."

She gave a cry of alarm.

"Oh, Lord!" she gasped, and suddenly rushed out. But once again I stopped her in the passage.

"I won't let you go like that," I said. "What are you afraid of? Are you late?"

"Yes, yes. I stole out. Let me go! She'll beat me," she screamed, evidently saying more than she meant to, and breaking away from me.

"Now listen, and don't rush away; you're going to Vasilyevsky Island, aren't you, and so am I, to Thirteenth Street. I'm late, too, and want to take a cab. D'you want to come with me? I'll take you there. It's quicker than walking, you know."

"You mustn't come with me, you mustn't," she cried, even more panic-stricken. Her features actually worked with terror at the very thought that I might come to the place where she lived.

"But I'm telling you I'm going to Thirteenth Street on business of my own. I'm not coming to your home! I won't follow you. We shall get there sooner with a cab. Come along!"

We hurried downstairs. I hailed the first driver I met with a miserable droshky. It was evident Yelena was in great haste, since she consented to get in with me. The curious thing was that I positively did not dare to question her. She waved her arms and almost leapt off the droshky when I asked her who she was so scared of at home. "What is the mystery?" I thought.

It was very awkward for her to sit on the droshky. At every jolt she clutched at my coat with her left hand—a dirty, chapped little hand, to keep her balance. In the other hand she held her books tightly. Those books were obviously very precious to her. As she recovered her balance she happened to show her leg, and to my immense astonishment I saw that she had no stockings, nothing but torn shoes. Although I had made up my mind not to question her about anything, I could not help asking again.

"Do you really have no stockings?" I asked. "You can't go about barefoot in such wet weather and when it's so cold!"

"I haven't," she answered abruptly.

"Good heavens! But you must be living with someone! You should have asked someone to lend you a pair since you had to go out."

"I want it this way...."

"But you'll get ill. You'll die!"

"What if I do?"

She evidently did not want to answer and was angry at my questions.

"Look! This was where he died." I said, pointing out the house near which the old man had died.

She looked intently, and suddenly turning with an imploring look, said to me:

"For God's sake don't follow me. But I'll come, I'll come again! As soon as I've a chance I'll come."

"Very well. I've told you already I won't follow you. But what are you afraid of? You must be unhappy in some way. It breaks my heart to look at you."

"I'm not afraid of anyone," she replied, with a note of irritation in her voice.

"But you said just now 'she'll beat me!' "

"Let her beat me!" she answered, and her eyes flashed. "Let her, let her!" she repeated bitterly, and her upper lip curled disdainfully and quivered.

At last we reached Vasilyevsky Island. She stopped the droshky at the beginning of Sixth Street, and jumped off, looking anxiously round.

"Drive away! I'll come, I'll come," she repeated, terribly uneasy, imploring me not to follow her. "Go on, hurry, hurry!"

I drove on. But after driving a few yards further along the embankment I dismissed the cab, and going back to Sixth Street ran quickly across the road. I saw her: she had not got far away yet, though she was walking quickly, and continually looking over her shoulder. She even stopped and peered back to see if I were following her. But I hid in a handy gateway, and she did not notice me

She walked on. I followed her, keeping on the other side of the street.

My curiosity was roused to the utmost. Though I had made up my mind not to follow her in, I felt I had to find out which house she lived in, just in case. I was overcome by a strange, oppressive sensation, not unlike the impression her grandfather had made on me when Azorka died in the restaurant.

CHAPTER IV

We walked a long way, as far as the Maly Prospekt. She was almost running. At last she went into a little shop. I stood still and waited. "Surely she doesn't live at that shop," I thought.

She did in fact come out a minute later, but without the books. Instead of the books she had an earthenware bowl in her hands. Going a little further she went in at the gateway of an unattractive-looking house. It was not a large house but it was a brick one, old, two-storeyed, painted a dirty-yellow colour. A miniature red coffin—trade sign of an insignificant coffin-maker—was displayed in one of the three ground floor windows. The windows of the upper storey were extremely small and perfectly square with dingy-green broken panes, through which I caught a glimpse of pink chintz curtains. I crossed the road, went up to the house, and read on an iron plate over the gate, "Mistress Bubnova."

But I had hardly deciphered the inscription when suddenly I heard a woman's piercing scream, followed by shouts of abuse in the yard. I looked through the gate: on the wooden porch steps stood a stout female in a head-dress, and a green shawl. Her face was of a revolting purplish colour. Her little, puffy, bloodshot eyes were gleaming with fury. It was evident that she was not sober, though it was so early in the day. She was shrieking at

poor Yelena, who stood petrified before her with the bowl in her hands. A dishevelled female, painted and rouged, peeped from the stairs behind the livid-faced woman. A little later a door opened on the area steps leading to the basement, and a poorly dressed, middle-aged woman of modest and decent appearance came out on the steps, probably attracted by the shouting. The other inhabitants of the basement, a decrepit old man and a young girl, were looking out from the half-opened door. A big, hulking man, probably the porter, stood still in the middle of the yard with a broom in his hand, and watched them indifferently.

"Ah, you damned slut, you bloodsucker, you louse!" screeched the woman, letting off at one breath all her store of abuse, for the most part without commas or stops, but with a sort of gasp. "So this is how you repay me for my care of you, you shaggy wench! She was just sent for some cucumbers and off she slipped! My heart told me she'd slip off when I sent her out! My heart ached and ached! And only last night I gave her a good shaking for it, and here she runs off again today. And where have you to go, you trollop? Where have you got to go! Who do you go to, you damned mummy, you staring viper, you poisonous vermin, who, who is it? Speak, you rotten scum, or I'll choke you where you stand!"

And the frenzied female flew at the poor girl, but seeing the woman looking at her from the porch steps, she suddenly checked herself, and addressing her, shrieked more shrilly than ever, waving her arms, as though calling her to witness the monstrous crimes of her luckless victim.

"Her mother's croaked! You know yourselves, good neighbours, she's left alone in the world. I saw she was on your hands, poor folks as you are, and you living from hand to mouth, yourselves. There, thought I, for St. Nicholas's sake I'll put myself out and take the orphan. So

I took her; and what would you think? Here I've been keeping her these two months, and upon by word she's been sucking my blood and wearing me to a shadow, the leech, the rattlesnake, the obstinate limb of Satan. You may beat her, or you may let her alone, she won't speak. You'd think she had her mouth full of water, the way she holds her tongue! She breaks my heart holding her tongue! What do you take yourself for, you saucy slut, you green-faced ape? If it hadn't been for me, you'd have starved in the gutter. You ought to be washing my feet and drinking the water, you monster, you black French poker! You'd have cocked your toes but for me!"

"But why are you upsetting yourself so, Anna Trifonovna? What has she done this time?" respectfully inquired the woman who had been addressed by the raving fury.

"Need you ask, my good soul, need you ask? I won't have people going against my will! I am one for having things my own way, right or wrong—I'm that sort! She's almost been the death of me this morning! I sent her to the shop to get some cucumbers, and here she arrives—three hours later! I'd a premonition when I sent her—my heart ached, it did, gnawing and gnawing. Where's she been? Where did she go? What protectors has she found for herself? And the things I'd done for her! Why, I forgave her slut of a mother a debt of fourteen rubles, had her buried at my own expense, and took her little devil to bring up, you know that, my dear soul, you know it yourself! Why, have I no rights over her, after that? She should feel it, but instead of feeling it she goes against me! Didn't I wish her well? I wanted to put her in a muslin frock, the dirty slut! I bought her a pair of boots at the Gostiny Dvor, and decked her out like a peacock, a sight for a holiday! And would you believe it, good people! In two days she'd tore up the dress, tore it into rags, and that's how she goes about, that's how she goes about! And what do you think? She tore it on purpose—I

wouldn't tell a lie. I saw it myself; as much as to say she would go in rags, she wouldn't wear muslin! Well, I paid her out! I gave her such a beating! But I had to call the doctor in afterwards and I paid him money, too. If I throttled you, you vermin, I'd just have to give up drinking milk for a week: that's all the penance there'd be for strangling you! I made her scrub the floor for a punishment; and what do you think, she scrubbed and scrubbed, the jade! My blood boiled as I watched her scrubbing. Well, thought I, she'll run away from me now. And I'd scarcely thought it when I looked round and off she'd gone, yesterday. You heard how I beat her for it yesterday, good people! My arms are still sore! I took away her shoes and stockings—she won't go off barefoot, thought I; yet she gave me the slip today too! Where have you been? Speak! Who have you been complaining of me to, you nettle-seed? Who have you been carrying tales to? Speak, you gypsy, you foreign mask! Speak!”

And in her frenzy she rushed at the terror-stricken little girl, clutched her by the hair, and crashed her to the ground. The bowl with the cucumbers in it was dashed aside and smashed; this only increased the drunken fury's rage. She rained blows on her victim's face and head; but Yelena remained obstinately mute: not a sound, not a cry, not a complaint escaped her, even under the blows.

Almost beside myself with indignation, I rushed into the yard, straight to the drunken women.

“What are you doing? How dare you treat a poor orphan like that?” I cried, seizing the fury by the arm.

“What's this? And who may you be?” she screamed, leaving Yelena, and putting her arms akimbo. “What do you want in my house?”

“To tell you you're a heartless woman,” I shouted. “How dare you bully a poor child like that? She's not yours. I just heard it myself that she's a poor orphan, and you only adopted her!”

"Lord Jesus!" shrieked the fury. "But who are you, poking your nose in. Did you come with her, eh? I'll go straight to the police captain! Andron Timofeich himself treats me like a lady. Why, is it you she goes to see, eh? Who do you think you are! He's come to make a row in another person's house. Help!"

And she flew at me, brandishing her fists. But at that instant we heard a piercing inhuman scream. I looked—Yelena, who had been standing as though unconscious, suddenly collapsed on the ground with a weird and horrible scream, and writhed there in awful convulsions. Her face was working. She was in an epileptic fit. The dishevelled female and the woman from the basement ran to her, lifted her up, and hurriedly carried her up the steps.

"She may choke for all I care, the damned slut!" the woman shrieked after her. "That's the third fit this month! Get off, you pimp," and she rushed at me again. "Why are you standing there, porter? What do you get your wages for?"

"Get along, get along! Do you want a smack on the head?" the porter boomed out lazily, apparently only as a matter of form. "Two's company and three's none. Make your bow and take your hook!"

There was no helping it. I went out at the gate, aware that my interference had been utterly useless. But I was seething with indignation. I stood on the pavement facing the house, and looked through the gate. As soon as I had gone out the fury rushed up the steps, and the porter, having done his duty, vanished. A minute later, the woman who had helped carry up Yelena hurried down the steps on the way to the basement. Seeing me she stood still and looked at me with curiosity. Her quiet, kindly face encouraged me. I went back into the yard and straight up to her.

"May I ask," I said, "who is this girl and what is that

horrible woman doing with her? Please don't imagine that I'm asking from idle curiosity. I've met the girl, and owing to special circumstances I am much interested in her."

"If you're interested in her you'd better take her home or find some place for her instead of letting her come to ruin here," said the woman with apparent reluctance, making a movement to get away from me.

"But if you don't enlighten me, what can I do? I tell you I know nothing about her. I suppose that's Bubnova herself, the landlady?"

"Yes."

"Then how did the girl fall into her hands? Did her mother die here?"

"Just fell into her hands, that's all. It's not our business."

And again she would have moved away.

"But please do me a kindness. I tell you it interests me very much. Perhaps I may be able to do something. Who is the girl? What was her mother? Do you know?"

"She looked like a foreigner of some sort; she lived down below with us; a newcomer she was but she was so ill; she died of consumption."

"Then she must have been very poor if she shared a room in the basement?"

"Goodness was she poor! She made your heart bleed! We can barely keep body and soul together, yet she owed us six rubles for the five months she lived with us. We buried her, too. My husband made the coffin."

"But Bubnova says she was the one who had her buried!"

"Bubnova! Oh, she does, does she?"

"And what was her surname?"

"I can't pronounce it, sir. It's difficult. It must have been German."

"Smith?"

"No, it wasn't that. Well, Anna Trifonovna took charge of the orphan, to bring her up, she says. But it's not proper at all."

"I suppose she took her for some object?"

"She's up to no good," answered the woman, seeming to ponder and hesitate whether to speak up or not. "But what's it to us? We're outsiders."

"You'd better keep a check on your tongue," I heard a man's voice say behind us. It was a middle-aged man in a dressing-gown with a full-coat over it, who looked like an artisan—the woman's husband.

"She's no call to be talking to you, sir; it's none of our business," he said, looking askance at me. "And you go in. Good-bye, sir; we're coffin-makers. If you ever need anything in our line we shall be pleased . . . but apart from that we've nothing to say."

I went out, musing, and greatly excited. I could do nothing but it was hard for me to leave it like that. Some of the things dropped by the coffin-maker's wife revolted me particularly. There was something evil behind all this; I could feel it.

I was walking away, looking down and meditating, when suddenly a sharp voice called me by my surname. I looked up: before me stood a man obviously intoxicated and practically swaying on his feet, dressed fairly neatly, but wearing a shabby overcoat and a greasy cap. His face was very familiar. I looked more closely. He winked at me and smiled ironically.

"Don't you know me?"

CHAPTER V

"Why, it's you, Masloboyev!" I cried, suddenly recognizing in him my old schoolmate from the provincial gymnasium. "Well, this is a surprise!"

"Yes, a surprise indeed! We've not met for six years or

so. Or rather, we have met, but Your Excellency would not vouchsafe me a look. To be sure, you're a general, a literary one that is, eh!" He smiled ironically as he said it.

"Come, Masloboyev, old boy, that's a lie!" I interrupted. "In the first place, generals look very different from me even if they are literary ones, and secondly, let me tell you, I do seem to remember having met you once or twice in the street, but you obviously avoided me. And why should I go up to a man if I see he's trying to avoid me? And do you know what I think? If you weren't drunk you wouldn't have called to me even now. Isn't that true now? Well, how are you? I'm very, very glad to have met you, old chap."

"Really? And I'm not compromising you by my ... 'unconventional' appearance? But there's no need to ask that. It's not a great matter; I always remember what a good little fellow you used to be, old Vanya. Do you remember you took a thrashing for me? You held your tongue and didn't give me away, and, instead of being grateful, I jeered at you for a week afterwards. You're a blessed innocent! Glad to see you, my dear soul!" (We kissed each other.) "How many years have I been on my own now—'From morn till night, from dark till light'; but I've not forgotten the old times. You don't forget these things. But what have you been doing, what have you been doing?"

"I? Why, I'm struggling along all by myself, too."

He gave me a long look, with the strong feeling of a man weakened by wine. However, he was an exceptionally kind man at any time.

"No, Vanya, you're different from me," he said at last in a tragic tone. "I've read it, Vanya, you know, I've read it.... But I say, let us have a heart-to-heart talk! Are you in a hurry?"

"I am, and I must confess I'm very much upset about something. You know what would be better? Where do you live?"

"I'll tell you. But that's not better; shall I tell you what is better?"

"Well, what?"

"Why, this, do you see?" and he pointed out to me a sign a few steps from where we were standing. "You see it's a confectioner's and restaurant; in other words an eating-house, but it's a good place. I tell you it's a decent place, and the vodka—there's no word for it! It's come all the way from Kiev on foot. I've drunk it, many a time I've drunk it, I know; and they wouldn't dare offer me poor stuff here. They know Filip Filippich. I'm Filip Filippich, you know. Why the scowl, eh? No, let me have my say. It's a quarter past eleven now; I've just looked. Well then, at twenty-five to twelve exactly I'll let you go. And in the meantime we'll drain the flowing bowl. Twenty minutes for an old friend. Is it a go?"

"If it's only twenty minutes, all right; because my dear chap, I really am busy."

"Well, that's a bargain. But I tell you what. Two words to begin with: you don't look any too cheerful . . . as if you were put out about something, is that so?"

"Yes."

"That's what I thought. I am going in for the study of physiognomy, you know; it's as good a pastime as any. Well, then, let's go and have a chat. In the twenty minutes I shall first of all manage to sip the cup that cheers and to toss off a glass of birch wine, and another of orange bitters, then a *parfait amour*, and then I'll think of something else. Yes, I drink, old man! The only time I'm sober is on a holiday before the early service. But you needn't drink if you don't want to. I just want to have you there. But if you do have a drink you'll show that yours is a noble heart indeed. Come along! We'll

have a little chat and then part for another ten years. I'm not fit company for you, friend Vanya!"

"Don't chatter so much, but let's hurry. The twenty minutes are yours and then let me go."

To get to the eating-house we had to go up a wooden staircase of two flights, leading from the street to the second storey. But on the stairs we suddenly came upon two gentlemen, very much the worse for drink. When they saw us they moved aside unsteadily.

One of them was a very young and youthful-looking lad, with an exaggeratedly stupid expression of face, with only a faint trace of moustache, and no beard. He was dressed like a dandy, but looked ridiculous, as though he were dressed up in someone else's clothes. He had valuable rings on his fingers, an expensive pin in his tie, and his hair was combed up into a crest which looked particularly fatuous. He kept smiling and sniggering. His companion, a man already in his fifties, was fat, big-bellied, dressed rather carelessly but with a pin in his tie, too, with a puffy, drunken, pock-marked face, a pair of spectacles on his button-like nose and a patchy growth of hair round his bald pate. The expression on his face was malicious and sensual. His evil, spiteful and mistrustful little eyes were lost in fat and seemed to be peeping through chinks. Evidently they both knew Maslobojev, but the one with the belly made a momentary grimace of vexation on seeing us, while the young man subsided into a smile of obsequious sweetness. He even took off his cap.

"Excuse us, Filip Filippich," he muttered, gazing tenderly at him.

"What is it?"

"I beg your pardon—I'm...." (He flicked at his collar.) "Mitroshka's in there. He's a scoundrel that's what he is, Filip Filippich."

"But what is the matter?"

"It's just so. . . . Why, last week he" (here he nodded towards his companion) "got his mug smeared with sour-cream in a certain establishment, all through that Mitroshka fellow . . ." he giggled.

His companion nudged him irritably with his elbow.

"What about coming with us, Filip Filippich. We'd empty a half-dozen at Dussot's. May we hope for your company?"

"No, my dear man, I can't now," answered Masloboyev. "I've business."

"And I've a little business, too . . . for you . . ." he sniggered. His companion nudged him with his elbow again.

"Afterwards! Afterwards!"

Masloboyev was evidently trying not to look at them. But no sooner had we entered the outer room, along the whole length of which ran a fairly clean counter, on which were set out a great number of cold dishes, pies, pastries, and decanters of different coloured liqueurs, when Masloboyev quickly drew me into a corner and said:

"The young fellow is Sizobryukhov, the son of the well-known corn-dealer; he came in for half a million when his father died, and now he is busy squandering it. He's been to Paris, and there he got through no end of money: perhaps he'd have spent it all there, but he came in for another fortune when his uncle died, and he came back from Paris. So he's getting through the rest of it here. In another year he'll be sending the hat round. He's as stupid as a goose. He goes about in the best restaurants and in cellars and bars, and with actresses, and he's trying to get into the hussars—he's just applied for a commission. The other, the elderly one, is Arkhipov, he's something in the way of a merchant, too, or an agent; he had something to do with tax farming, too. He's a cad, a rotter and the present pal of Sizobryukhov's. He's a Judas and a Falstaff, both at once; he's twice been made

bankrupt, and he's a disgustingly sensual brute, up to all sorts of perversions. I know one criminal affair in that line that he was mixed up in; but he managed to wriggle out of it. There's a reason why I'm very glad I met him here; I was on the look-out for him. He's plucking Sizobryukhov now, of course. He knows all sorts of queer places, which is what makes him so valuable to young fellows like that. I've had a grudge against him for ever so long. Mitroshka's got a bone to pick with him, too—that dashing fellow with the gypsy face in the rich tunic, standing by the window. He deals in horses; he's known to all the hussars about here. I tell you, he's such a clever rogue, he'll make a false bank-note before your very eyes, and you'll give him change on it though you'd seen him make it. He wears a tunic, though it's a velvet one, and looks like a Slavophile (I think it suits him though); but put him into a perfectly fitting dress-coat and everything, take him to the English club and call him the great landowner Count Barabanov; he'll pass for a count for two hours, play whist, and talk like a count, and they'll never guess; he'll take them all in. He'll come to a bad end. Well, Mitroshka's got a great grudge against the pot-belly, for Mitroshka's hard up just now. Sizobryukhov used to be very thick with him, but the pot-belly's carried him off before Mitroshka had time to fleece him properly. If they met in the eating-house just now there must be something up. I even know what it is, and can guess that it was Mitroshka and no one else gave me the tip that they'd be here, hanging about these parts after some dirty business. I want to take advantage of Mitroshka's hatred for Arkhipov, for I have my own reasons, and indeed I came here chiefly on that account. I don't want to let Mitroshka see, and don't you keep looking at him, but when we go out he's sure to come up himself and tell me what I want to know.... Now come along, Vanya, into that room over here, do you see? Well,

Stepan," he said, addressing the waiter, "do you understand what I want?"

"Yes, sir."

"And will you get it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then get it. Sit down, Vanya. Why do you keep looking at me like that? I see you're looking at me. Are you surprised? Don't be surprised. Anything may happen to a man, even what he's never dreamed of . . . especially in the days when . . . even in the days when we used to cram Cornelius Nepos together. Now, Vanya, be sure of one thing: though Maslobojev may have strayed from the right path his heart is still unchanged, it's only circumstances that have altered. Though I may not be so good, I'm no worse than the rest. I set up for being a doctor, and I trained as a teacher of Russian literature, and I wrote an article on Gogol, and thought of going to the gold-diggings, and almost got married. A living soul longs for something sweet in life, and *she* consented, though I was so poor I had nothing to tempt a cat with. I was on the point of borrowing a pair of good boots for the marriage ceremony, for mine had been in holes for a year and a half. . . . But I didn't get married. She married a teacher, and I went and got a job as an office clerk, not a commercial office, but just an ordinary one. And then the tune changed. Years have rolled by, and though I'm not in the service I make enough to jog along: I take bribes without ruth and yet stand firm for the truth. I hunt with the hounds and I run with the hare. I have principles. I know, for instance, that one can't fight single-handed, and I mind my own business. My business is chiefly in the confidential line, you understand."

"You're not some sort of detective, are you?"

"No, not exactly a detective, but I do take on jobs, partly professionally, and partly on my own account. It's this way, Vanya: I drink vodka. But as I haven't drunk

my wits away, I know what lies before me. My time is past; there's no washing a black nag white. One thing I will say: if the man in me were past responding I should not have come up to you today, Vanya. You're right, I'd met you and seen you before, and many a time I longed to speak, but I didn't dare, I kept putting it off. I'm not worthy of you. And you were right, Vanya, when you said that I came up to you this time only because I was drunk; and though this is all awful rot we'll finish with me now. We'd better talk of you. Well, my dear soul, I've read it! I've read it through. I'm talking of your first-born, friend of mine. When I read it, I almost became a respectable man. I almost did, but I thought better of it, and preferred to remain a disreputable one. So there it is...."

And he said much more. He got more and more drunk, and became very maudlin, almost lachrymose. Maslobojev had always been a capital fellow, but cunning, and as it were precocious; he had been a shrewd, crafty, artful dodger from his school-days but on the whole he was not altogether bad; but he was a lost man. Among the Russians there are many such men. They often have great abilities, but everything seems tangled up in them, and what's more they are quite capable of knowingly acting against their conscience in certain cases through weakness, and not only come to inevitable ruin, but know beforehand that they are on the road to ruin. Maslobojev, for one, was drowning himself in vodka.

"One more word now, friend," he went on. "I heard how loudly your fame resounded at first; I read several criticisms on you afterwards. (I really did; you imagine I never read anything.) I saw you afterwards in broken boots, in the mud without galoshes, with a battered hat, and I drew my own conclusions. Earning a bit here and there writing articles, are you?"

"Yes, Maslobojev."

"Joined the literary hacks?"

"Looks like it."

"Well, to this I'll tell you something, my boy: drinking is better. When I get drunk, for instance, I lie on my sofa (and I have a capital sofa with springs), and I dream I am Homer, or Dante, or some Frederick Barbarossa—anything I like to imagine, you know. Now you can't dream you're a Dante, or a Frederick Barbarossa, in the first place because you want to be yourself, and secondly, because all wishing is forbidden you; for you're a literary hack. I have daydreams, but you have reality. Listen to me, tell me frankly, straightforwardly, speaking as a brother (if you won't you'll offend and humiliate me for ten years at least), do you need any money? I have some. Now, don't make faces. Take the money, pay off the entrepreneurs, throw off your yoke, then, when you're secure of a year's living, settle down to your cherished idea, write a great book! Eh? What do you say?"

"Look here, Maslobojev! I appreciate your brotherly offer, but I can't make any answer at present, and the reason why is a long story. There are circumstances. But I promise to tell you everything afterwards, like a brother. I thank you for your offer. I promise that I'll come to you, and I'll come often. But this is what I want to tell you. You have been open with me, and so I've made up my mind to ask your advice, especially as I believe you're a master hand in such affairs."

I told him the whole story of Smith and his granddaughter, beginning with the scene in the confectionery. Strange to say, as I told my tale I seemed to read in his eyes that he knew something about the story. I asked him.

"No, not exactly," he answered, "though I have heard something about Smith, a story of some old man dying in a shop. But I really do know something about Mistress Bubnova. Only two months ago I collected a bribe from that lady. *Je prends mon bien où je le trouve*, and that's the only respect in which I am like Molière. Though I

made her cough up a hundred rubles I vowed at the time I'd wring another five hundred out of her before I'd done. She's a nasty woman! Her line of business is outside the pale. That wouldn't matter, but sometimes it goes too far. Don't imagine I'm a Don Quixote, please. The point is that I may make a very good thing of it, and when I met Sizobryukhov half an hour ago I was awfully pleased. Sizobryukhov was evidently brought here, and it was the pot-belly who brought him, and since I know what the pot-belly's special trade is, I conclude . . . oh, well, I'll put a lid on him! I'm very glad I heard from you about that girl; it's another clue for me. I undertake all sorts of private jobs, you know, and you'd be surprised what people I know! I investigated a little affair for a prince not long ago, an affair, I tell you, one wouldn't have expected from that prince. Or would you care to hear another story about a married woman? You come and see me, old man, and I've got a wealth of such plots ready for you that people will never believe they're true if you write about them."

"And what was the name of that prince?" something prompted me to ask.

"What do you want to know it for? All right, it's Valkovsky."

"Pyotr?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Yes, but not very well. Well, Masloboyev, I shall come to you to inquire about that gentleman more than once again," I said, getting up. "You've interested me terribly."

"Well, old friend, come as often as you like. I'm good at telling stories but only within certain limits, do you understand? Or else I'll lose my credit and honour, in business that is, and all the rest of it."

"All right, as far as your honour permits."

I was really agitated. He noticed it.

"Well, what do you say about the story I told you? Have you thought of something?"

"Your story? Well, wait a second. I'll just go and pay."

He went up to the counter, and there, as though by chance, he found himself beside the young fellow in the tunic, who was so unceremoniously called Mitroshka. It seemed to me that Masloboyev knew him somewhat better than he had admitted to me. Anyway, it was evident that they were not meeting for the first time.

Mitroshka was a rather original-looking fellow. In his sleeveless tunic and red silk shirt, with his sharp but handsome features, quite youthful still and swarthy, with his bold, sparkling eyes, he made a curious and not unattractive impression. The attitude he assumed was somehow ostentatiously daring, but at the moment he was evidently restraining himself, aiming rather at an air of businesslike gravity and sedateness.

"Look here, Vanya," said Masloboyev when he rejoined me, "look me up this evening at seven o'clock, and I may have something to tell you. By myself, you see, I don't amount to much; in the old days I did, but now I'm only a drunkard and have got out of the way of things. But I've still kept my old connections; I may find out something, sniff about among all sorts of sharp people; that's how I get on. In my free time, that is when I'm sober, I do something myself, it's true, through friends, too . . . mostly in the investigation line. But that's neither here nor there. Enough. Here's my address, in Shestila-vochnaya Street. But now, old man, I'm really too far gone. I'll swallow another—and home. I must lie down a bit. If you come I'll introduce you to Alexandra Semyonovna, and if there's time we'll discuss poetry."

"Well, and about that, too?"

"That, too, perhaps."

"I think I'll come. I'll certainly come. . . ."

CHAPTER VI

Anna Andreyevna had long been expecting me. What I had told her the day before about Natasha's note, had greatly excited her curiosity; and she had expected me much earlier in the morning, by ten o'clock at the latest. By the time I turned up at one o'clock in the afternoon the poor woman's agonies of suspense had reached an extreme pitch. She was longing, too, to talk to me of the new hopes aroused in her the day before, and of Nikolai Sergeich, who had been ailing since then, had grown gloomy, and at the same time seemed specially tender to her. At first when I made my appearance she received me with an expression of coldness and displeasure on her face, hardly opened her mouth, and showed no sign of interest, almost as though she would say: "What do you want? Man, must you come dragging here every single day?" She was angry at my coming so late. But I was in a hurry, so without further delay I described to her the whole scene at Natasha's the evening before. As soon as I had told her of the elder prince's visit and his solemn proposal, her assumed moodiness vanished instantly. I cannot find words to describe how glad she was; she seemed quite beside herself—she crossed herself, wept, prostrated herself before the icons, embraced me, and was on the point of running to Nikolai Sergeich to tell him of her joy.

"But you know, my dear, it's all these insults and humiliations that have been preying on his mind, and as soon as he knows that Natasha has been shown proper respect, he'll forget it all in a twinkling."

I barely managed to dissuade her. Though the good lady had lived with her husband for twenty-five years she did not understand him yet. She was desperately anxious, too, to set off with me immediately to Natasha's. I put it to her that not only would Nikolai Sergeich perhaps

disapprove of her action, but that we might even ruin the whole business by going. With difficulty she was brought to think better of it, but she detained me another half-hour unnecessarily, doing all the talking herself.

"And would you forsake me now?" she said, "sitting alone within these four walls with such joy in my heart?"

At last I persuaded her to let me go, reminding her that Natasha must be sick of waiting for me. She made the sign of the cross several times to bless me on my way, sent a special blessing to Natasha, and almost burst into tears when I absolutely refused to come back again that evening, if nothing special happened to Natasha. I did not see Nikolai Sergeich on this occasion; he had not been able to sleep all night, had complained of a headache, a chill, and was now asleep in his study.

Natasha, too, had been expecting me all the morning. When I went in she was, as usual, walking up and down the room, with her hands clasped, meditating over something. Even now when I think of her I always see her alone in a poor room, dreamy, deserted, waiting, with folded hands, and downcast eyes, walking aimlessly to and fro.

Without pausing in her pacing she asked me in a low voice why I was so late. I gave her a brief account of all my adventures, but she scarcely listened. I could see she was in great anxiety about something.

"Anything new?" I asked her.

"Nothing new," she answered. But I guessed at once from her face that there *was* something new, and that this was why she was expecting me, but she would not tell me now, but only when I was ready to leave, as she always did. That was her usual way with me. I was accustomed to this and waited.

We began, of course, talking of the previous evening. What particularly struck me was the fact that we were quite agreed in our impression of Prince Valkovsky; she

definitely disliked him, disliked him much more than she did yesterday. And when we analyzed the visit, point by point, Natasha suddenly said:

"Listen, Vanya, you know it's always like that, if you dislike a person at first, it's almost a sure sign that you will like him afterwards. At least that's how it's always been with me."

"Let us hope so, Natasha. And this is my opinion, and it's a final one: I went over it all, and what I deduced was that, though the prince was perhaps jesuitical, he is giving his consent to your marriage genuinely and in earnest."

Natasha stood still in the middle of the room and looked at me sternly. Her whole face was transformed; even her lips twitched a little.

"But how could he in a case like *this* begin deceiving and . . . lying?" she asked in proud bewilderment.

"Of course not, of course not!" I assented hurriedly.

"Of course he wasn't lying. I think there's no question of that at all. There's no reason to be found for such deception. And, after all, what do I stand for in his eyes that he could jeer at me like that? Could any man be capable of such an insult?"

"Of course not, of course not," I agreed, while I thought to myself: "You're probably thinking of nothing else as you pace up and down, my poor girl, and very likely you're even more doubtful about it than I am."

"Ah, how I wish he were coming back sooner!" she said. "He wanted to spend the whole evening with me, and then. . . . It must have been important business, since he's given it all up and gone away. You don't know what it is, Vanya? You haven't heard anything?"

"The Lord only knows. You know he's always busy making money. I've heard he's taking up a share in some contract in Petersburg. We know nothing about business, Natasha."

"Of course we don't. Alyosha talked of some letter yesterday."

"News of some sort. Has Alyosha been here?"

"Yes."

"Early?"

"At twelve o'clock; he sleeps late, you know. He stayed a little while. I sent him off to Katerina Fyodorovna, I had to, Vanya."

"Why, didn't he mean to go himself?"

"Yes, he did. . . ."

She was about to say more, but checked herself. I looked at her and waited. Her face was sad. I would have asked her, but sometimes she particularly disliked being questioned.

"He's a strange boy," she said at last, with a slight twist of her mouth, and apparently trying not to look at me.

"Why? Has something happened?"

"No, nothing; I just thought. . . . He was sweet though. Only. . . ."

"All his cares and anxieties are over now," said I.

Natasha looked intently and searchingly at me. She felt inclined perhaps to answer: "He hadn't many cares or anxieties before," but she fancied that my words concealed the same thought. And this annoyed her.

However, she became friendly and cordial again at once. That day she was extraordinarily gentle. I spent more than an hour with her. She was very uneasy. The prince frightened her. I noticed from some of her questions that she was very anxious to know for certain what sort of impression she had made on him. Had she behaved properly? Hadn't she betrayed her joy too openly? Had she been too ready to take offence? Or on the contrary too conciliatory? He mustn't imagine anything. He mustn't laugh at her. He mustn't feel contempt for her. . . . Her cheeks glowed like fire at the thought.

"How can you be so upset merely because a bad man

might imagine something? Let him imagine anything he likes!" said I.

"But why do you say he's bad?" she asked.

Natasha was suspicious but straightforward and pure of heart. Her doubts came from no impure source. She was proud but with a noble pride, and could not bear to have anything she thought highly of turned into a laughing-stock before her. She would, of course, have met with contempt the contempt of a base man, but at the same time her heart would have ached at mockery of what she thought sacred, whoever had been the mocker. This was not due to any lack of firmness. It arose partly from too limited a knowledge of the world, from being unaccustomed to people, from having been shut up in her own little groove. She had spent all her life in her own little corner and had hardly left it. And finally that characteristic of good-natured people, inherited perhaps from her father—the habit of being too enthusiastic about people they just met, of persistently thinking them better than they really are, of exaggerating everything good in them—was highly developed in her. It is hard for such people to be disillusioned afterwards; and it is hardest of all when they feel they are themselves to blame. Why did they expect more than could be given? And a disappointment like that is always in store for such people. It is best for them to stay quietly in their corners and not to go out into the world; I have noticed, in fact, that they really love their corners so much that they even grow shy and unsociable in them. Natasha, however, had suffered many misfortunes, many humiliations. She was already a wounded creature, and she cannot be blamed, if indeed there be any blame in what I have said.

But I was in a hurry so I got up to go. She was surprised and almost cried at my going, though she had shown no particular affection to me all the while I was with her; on the contrary, she seemed rather colder to me

than usual. She kissed me warmly and looked strangely long into my eyes.

"D'you know," she said, "Alyosha was awfully funny this morning and quite surprised me. He was very sweet, very happy, apparently, but flew in, such a butterfly, such a dandy, and kept prinking before the looking-glass. He's a little too unceremonious now . . . and he didn't stay long. Fancy, he brought me some sweets."

"Sweets? Why, that was very nice and kind of him. Ah, what a pair you are. Now you've begun watching and spying on one another, studying each other's faces, and reading hidden thoughts in them (and understanding nothing about it). He's not so bad, though. He's merry and schoolboyish as he always was. But you, you!"

And whenever Natasha changed her tone and came to me with some complaint against Alyosha, or to ask for a solution of some ticklish question, or to tell me some secret, expecting me to understand her at a word, she always, I remember, looked at me with a timid smile, and seemed to implore me to answer her so that it would relieve her mind at once. And I remember, too, that in such cases I always assumed a severe and harsh tone, as though scolding someone, and this happened quite unconsciously with me, but it was always effective. My severity and gravity were quite appropriate; they seemed more authoritative, and people sometimes feel an irresistible craving to be scolded. At least it comforted Natasha perfectly sometimes.

"No, Vanya, you see," she went on, keeping one of her hands on my shoulder, while pressing my hand with the other and looking pleadingly into my eyes. "I fancied that he did not feel it enough, somehow . . . he seemed already such a *mari*—you know, as though he'd been married ten years but was still polite to his wife. Isn't that very premature? He laughed, and prinked, but just as if all that didn't matter, as if it only partly concerned me, and not

as it used to be . . . he was in a great hurry to see Kate-
rina Fyodorovna. If I spoke to him he didn't listen to me,
or began talking of something else, you know, that
horrid, aristocratic habit we've both been getting him out
of. In fact, he was so . . . even indifferent it seemed . . . but
what am I saying! Here I'm at it again, here I've begun!
Ah, what exacting, capricious despots we all are, Vanya!
Only now I see it! We can't forgive a man a trifling
change in his face, and yet God knows what has made his
face change! You were right, Vanya, in reproaching me
just now. It's all my own fault. We make our own trou-
bles and then we complain of them. . . . Thank you, Vanya,
you have quite comforted me. Ah, if he would only come
today! But there! Perhaps he'll be angry for what hap-
pened this morning."

"Surely you haven't quarrelled already!" I cried with
surprise.

"I never showed it! I was a little sad, that's all, and
though he came in so cheerful he suddenly became
thoughtful, and I fancied his good-bye was cool. But I'll
send for him. You come this evening, too, Vanya."

"Yes, I certainly shall, unless I'm detained by one
thing."

"Why, what thing is it?"

"Oh, something I brought on myself! But I think I'm
sure to come all the same."

CHAPTER VII

At seven o'clock precisely I was at Masloboyev's. He
lived in a lodge, in Shestilavochnaya Street. He had three
rather untidy but not poorly furnished rooms. There was
even the appearance of some prosperity, but at the same
time an utter lack of management. The door was opened
by a very pretty girl of nineteen or so, plainly but charm-

ingly dressed, immaculately neat, and with the kindest and merriest of eyes. I guessed at once that this was the Alexandra Semyonovna whom he had mentioned in passing that morning, holding out an introduction to her as an allurement to me. She asked who I was, and on hearing my name said that Maslobojev was expecting me, but that he was asleep now in his room, to which she took me. Maslobojev was asleep on a very good soft sofa with his dirty greatcoat over him, and a shabby leather pillow under his head. He was sleeping very lightly: the moment we walked in he called me by my name.

"Oh, is that you? I was expecting you. I've just had a dream that you'd come in and were waking me. So it's time. Come along."

"Where are we going?"

"To see a lady."

"What lady? Why?"

"Mme. Bubnova, to pay her out. What a beauty!" he drawled, turning to Alexandra Semyonovna, and he even kissed his finger-tips at the thought of Mme. Bubnova.

"Now he's off on his nonsense!" said Alexandra Semyonovna, feeling it incumbent on her to make a show of anger.

"You haven't met, have you? Let me introduce you, old man. Here, Alexandra Semyonovna, may I present to you a literary general; it's only once a year they're on view free, at other times you have to pay."

"You can't take me in, you know! Please don't listen to him; he's always laughing at me. How can this gentleman be a general!"

"That's just what I'm telling you, he's a special sort. But don't you imagine, Your Excellency, that we're silly; we are much cleverer than we seem at first sight."

"Don't listen to him! He's always putting me to confusion before decent folk, the shameless fellow. He'd much better take me to the theatre sometimes."

"Alexandra Semyonovna, love your household. You haven't forgotten what you must love, have you? Have you forgotten the little word? The one I taught you?"

"Of course I haven't! I suppose it means something silly."

"Well, what is the word then?"

"Hmph! I wouldn't go and disgrace myself before a visitor! Perhaps it means something shameful. Strike me dumb if I'll say it!"

"Well, you have forgotten then."

"And I haven't either: penates!... Love your penates, see what he's invented! Perhaps there never were any penates. And why should one love them. He's always talking nonsense!"

"But at Mme. Bubnova's...."

"Go on, you and your Bubnova!"

And Alexandra Semyonovna ran out of the room in great indignation.

"It's time to go. Good-bye, Alexandra Semyonovna."

We went out.

"Look here, Vanya, first let's get into this cab. That's right. And secondly, I found out something after I had left you yesterday, and not by guesswork, but for a certainty. I stayed a whole hour longer in Vasilyevsky Island. That pot-belly is an awful swine, a nasty, filthy brute, perverted, and with vile tastes of all kinds. This Bubnova has long been known for some shifty doings in the same line. She almost got caught over a little girl of respectable family the other day. The muslin dresses she decked that orphan in (as you described this morning) wouldn't let me rest, because I've heard something of the sort already. I found out something else this morning, quite by chance, it is true, but I think I can rely on it. How old is the girl?"

"From her face I should say thirteen."

"But small for her age. Of course, that's how she'll do it. When need be she'll say she's eleven, and another time that she's fifteen. And as the poor child has no family or anyone to protect her she. . . ."

"Not really?"

"And what did you think? Would Mme. Bubnova have adopted an orphan simply out of compassion? And if the pot-belly's hanging round, you may be sure it's that. He saw her this morning. And that blockhead Sizobryukhov's been promised a beauty today, a married woman, an officer's wife, a woman of rank. These profligate merchants' sons are always keen on that; they're always on the look-out for rank. It's like that rule in the Latin grammar, do you remember; the significance takes precedence over the ending. But I believe I'm still drunk from this morning. Bubnova had better not dare meddle in such doings. She wants to dupe the police, too; but she won't get away with it! And so I'll give her a scare, for she knows that for the sake of old scores . . . and all the rest of it, do you understand?"

I was terribly shocked. All these revelations alarmed me beyond description. I was afraid that we'd be late and kept urging on the cabman.

"Don't worry. Measures have been taken," said Maslobojev. "Mitroshka's there. Sizobryukhov will pay for it with money; but the pot-bellied scoundrel with his hide. That was agreed upon this morning. Well, and Bubnova comes to my share . . . because she'd better not dare. . . ."

We drew up at the eating-house; but the man called Mitroshka was not there. Telling the cabman to wait for us at the eating-house steps, we walked to Mme. Bubnova's. Mitroshka was waiting for us at the gate. There was a bright light in the windows, and we heard Sizobryukhov's drunken peals of laughter.

"They're all here, have been a quarter of an hour," Mitroshka announced; "now's the very time."

"But how shall we get in?" I asked.

"As visitors," replied Maslobojev. "She knows me, and she knows Mitroshka, too. It's true it's all locked up, but not for us."

He tapped softly at the gate, and it was immediately opened. The porter opened it and exchanged a wink with Mitroshka. We went in quietly; we were not heard from the house. The porter led us up the steps and knocked. They asked who it was from within. He said he was alone and had to come in.

The door was opened and we all went in together. The porter vanished.

"Hey, who's this?" screamed Mme. Bubnova, who stood drunken and dishevelled in the tiny entry, holding a candle in her hand.

"Who?" answered Maslobojev quickly. "How can you ask, Anna Trifonovna. Don't you know your honoured guests? Who, if not us ... Filip Filippich."

"Ah, Filip Filippich! It's you... very welcome.... But how is it you ... I don't know ... please walk in here."

She was absolutely flustered.

"Where here? But there's a partition here! No, you must give us a better reception. We'll have a drop of champagne. But aren't there any little pretties?"

The woman regained her confidence at once.

"Why, for such honoured guests, I'd get them if I had to dig for them underground. I'd send to the kingdom of China itself for them."

"Two words, Anna Trifonovna, my pet; is Sizobryukhov here?"

"Y-es."

"He's just the man I want. How dare he go off on the spree without me, the rascal?"

"I don't think he has forgotten you. He seems to be expecting someone; it must be you."

Masloboyev pushed the door, and we found ourselves in a small room with two windows with geraniums in them, with wicker-work chairs, and a battered piano; all as one would expect. But even before we went in, while we were still talking in the passage, Mitroshka had disappeared. I learned afterwards that he had not crossed the threshold at all but had been waiting behind the door. He had someone to open it to him afterwards. The dishevelled and painted woman I had seen peeping over Mme. Bubnova's shoulder that morning was a relative of his.

Sizobryukhov was sitting on a skimpy little sofa of imitation mahogany, before a round table with a cloth on it. On the table were two bottles of tepid champagne, and a bottle of bad rum; and there were plates of sweets, biscuits, and nuts of three sorts. At the table facing Sizobryukhov sat a loathsome, pock-marked female of about forty wearing a black taffeta dress, bronze brooches and bracelets. This was the "officer's wife"—obviously a sham. Sizobryukhov was drunk and very pleased with himself. His pot-bellied friend was not with him.

"That's a nice thing to do!" Masloboyev bawled at the top of his voice. "After inviting one to Dussot's, too!"

"Filip Filippich, honoured, I am," muttered Sizobryukhov, getting up to meet us with a blissful air.

"Drinking, are you?"

"Begging your pardon, I am."

"Don't apologize, better invite your guests to join you. We've come to make a night of it with you. Here, I've brought a friend along."

Masloboyev pointed to me.

"Delighted, that is, honoured . . ." he giggled.

"Ugh, do you call this champagne? It's more like sour cabbage soup."

"Must you say that?"

"I suppose you don't dare show yourself at Dussot's! And inviting me there, too!"

"He's just been telling me he's been in Paris," put in the officer's wife. "He must be fibbing, eh!"

"Fedosya Titishna, don't insult me. I have been there. I really have."

"A country bumpkin like him in Paris!"

"We have! Yes, we have! Me and Karp Vasilyich—we showed them! Do you know Karp Vasilyich?"

"What do I want to know your Karp Vasilyich for?"

"Well, just like that . . . it might be worth your while. Why, we broke an English pier-glass there, in a spot called Paris, at Mme. Joubert's."

"What did you break?"

"A pier-glass. There was a looking-glass over the whole wall, way up to the ceiling, and Karp Vasilyich was that drunk he began talking Russian to Mme. Joubert. He stood by that pier-glass and leaned against it. And Joubert screamed at him in her own tongue that the pier-glass cost seven hundred francs (that means two hundred rubles), and that he'd break it! He grins and looks at me. And I am sitting on a sofa opposite, and a beauty beside me, not a mug like this one here, but a stunner, that's the only word for it. He cries out: 'Stepan Terentyich, hey, Stepan Terentyich! We'll go halves, shall we?' And I said: 'Done!' And then he crashes that fist of his into the looking-glass! Bang! The glass was all in splinters. Joubert let out a yelp and went for him straight in the face: 'What are you about, you ruffian?' (In her own lingo, that is). 'Mme. Joubert,' says he, 'take the money but don't try to balk my will!' And on the spot he forked out six hundred and fifty francs. We haggled down the other fifty."

At that moment there was a terrible, piercing scream, coming from behind several doors, two or three rooms away from the one in which we were. I shuddered, and I, too, cried out. I recognized that scream: it was Yelena's voice. Immediately after that pitiful scream we heard

shouts, oaths, a scuffle, and finally the loud, resonant, distinct sounds of a face being slapped. It must have been Mitroshka inflicting chastisement in his own fashion. Suddenly the door was violently flung open and Yelena rushed into the room with a bloodless face and dazed eyes, in a white muslin dress, crumpled and torn, and with her hair, which had been carefully arranged, now tousled as in a struggle. I stood facing the door, and she rushed straight to me and flung her arms round me. Every one jumped up in alarm. There was shouting and squealing when she flew in. Then Mitroshka appeared in the doorway, dragging after him by the hair his pot-bellied foe, who was in a most bedraggled condition. He hauled him up to the door and flung him into the room.

"Here he is! Take him!" Mitroshka announced with an air of complete satisfaction.

"Listen to me," said Maslobojev, coming calmly up to me and tapping me on the shoulder, "take our cab, take the child with you and drive home; there's nothing more for you to do here. We'll arrange the rest tomorrow."

I did not need telling twice. I seized Yelena by the hand and took her out of that den. I don't know how things ended there. No one stopped us; our hostess was petrified with horror. Everything had happened so quickly that she was unable to interfere. The cab was waiting for us, and in twenty minutes we were at my lodgings.

Yelena seemed more dead than alive. I unfastened the hooks of her dress, sprinkled her with water, and laid her on the sofa. Fever and delirium were setting in. I looked at her pale little face, at her colourless lips, at her black hair, tumbling down one side, though originally well brushed and pomaded, at her whole get-up, at the pink bows which still remained here and there on her dress—and I understood fully the whole of this hideous affair. Poor little thing! She grew worse and worse. I did not leave her, and I resolved not to go to Natasha's that

evening. Now and then Yelena raised her long eyelashes and glanced up at me, and gazed long and intently as though she were recognizing me. It was late, past midnight, when at last she fell asleep. I dropped off on the floor beside her.

CHAPTER VIII

I got up very early. I had waked up almost every half-hour through the night, and gone up to look at my poor little visitor. She was in a fever and slightly delirious. But towards morning she fell into a sound sleep. A good sign, thought I, but when I awoke in the morning I decided to run for the doctor, while the poor little thing was still asleep. I knew a doctor, a very good-natured old bachelor, who had been living in Vladimirsky Street from times immemorial with his German housekeeper for an only servant. I set off to him. He promised to call at ten o'clock. It was eight when I left him. I wanted terribly to call in at Maslobojev's on the way, but I thought better of it: he was sure to be still asleep since last night and besides, Yelena might wake up and probably feel frightened at finding herself alone in my room. In her feverish state she might well forget how and when she had come there.

She awoke at the very moment when I was coming back into the room. I went up to her and cautiously asked her how she felt. She did not answer, but gazed at me long and earnestly with her expressive black eyes. I thought from the look in her eyes that she was fully conscious and understood everything. Her not answering me was perhaps just her invariable habit. Both on the previous day, and on the day before that when she had come to see me she had not uttered a word in answer to some of my questions, but had only looked into my face with her slow, persistent stare, in which there was a strange sort of pride as well as wonder and wild curiosity. Now I noticed a se-

verity, even, I should say, mistrustfulness in her eyes. I was putting my hand on her forehead to feel whether she were still feverish, but she drew my hand away with her little one softly and silently and turned away from me to the wall. I left her side that I might not worry her.

I had a big copper kettle. I had long used it instead of a samovar, and boiled water in it. There was plenty of firewood, the porter had brought me up enough to last for five days. I lighted the stove, fetched some water and put the kettle on. I laid the tea-things on the table. Yelena turned towards me and watched it all with curiosity. I asked her whether she would not have something. But again she turned away from me and made no answer.

"Why is she angry with *me*?" I wondered. "Queer little girl!"

My old doctor came at ten o'clock as promised. He examined the patient with German thoroughness, and greatly cheered me by saying that though she was feverish there was no special danger. He added that she probably had another, a chronic disease, some irregularity in the functioning of the heart, "but that point would want special watching, and at the moment she's out of danger." More from custom than necessity he prescribed her a mixture and some powders, and at once proceeded to ask me how she came to be with me. At the same time he looked about my room wonderingly. The old man was an awful chatterbox.

And as for Yelena, she quite amazed him; she pulled her hand away when he tried to feel her pulse, and would not show him her tongue; to all his questions she did not answer one word but just kept staring fixedly at the enormous Stanislav order that hung upon his neck.

"Most likely her head is aching badly," said the old man, "but how she does stare!"

I did not think it necessary to tell him all about Yelena, so I put him off, saying it was a long story.

"Let me know if you need me," said he on leaving. "But at present there's no danger."

I made up my mind to stay all day with Yelena, and to leave her alone as rarely as possible till she was quite well. But knowing that Natasha and Anna Andreyevna would be worried sick if they waited for me in vain, I decided to let Natasha know by post that I could not be with her that day. I could not write to Anna Andreyevna. She had asked me herself never again to write her, after I had once sent her a note when Natasha was ill. "My old man scowls when he sees a letter from you," she said. "He wants to know, poor dear, what's in the letter, and he can't ask, he can't bring himself to. And so he's upset for the whole day. And besides, my dear, you'll only whet my curiosity with your letters. What's the use of a dozen lines. I'll want to ask the details and you're not there." And so I only wrote to Natasha, and posted the letter when I took the prescriptions to the chemist's.

Meanwhile Yelena fell asleep again. She moaned faintly and shuddered in her sleep. The doctor had guessed right, she had a bad headache. From time to time she cried out and woke up, glancing at me with positive resentment, as though she found my attention particularly irksome. I must confess this hurt me very much.

At eleven o'clock Maslobojev turned up. He was pre-occupied and seemed absent-minded; he only came in for a minute, and was in a great hurry to get away.

"Well, brother, I didn't expect that you lived in great style," he observed, looking round, "but I never thought I should find you in such a box. This is a box, not a lodging you know. But that's nothing after all; what does matter is that all these outside worries take you off your work. I thought of that yesterday when we were driving to Bubnova's. You know, old chap, by natural temperament and by social position I'm one of those people who can do nothing sensible themselves, but who lecture others

that they should. Now, listen: I'll look in, perhaps, tomorrow or next day, and you be sure to come and see me on Sunday morning. I hope by then the problem of this child will be completely settled; then we'll talk things over seriously, because you need someone to take you in hand. You can't go on living like this. I only dropped a hint yesterday, but now I'll put it before you logically. Tell me, once and for all, do you consider it dishonourable to take some money from me for a time?"

"Come, let's not quarrel," I interrupted. "You'd better tell me how things ended there yesterday."

"Oh that! Everything ended most satisfactorily, and the object attained, understand? I've no time now. I only looked in for a minute to tell you I'm busy and have no time for you, and to find out by the way whether you're going to place her somewhere, or whether you mean to keep her yourself. Because it wants thinking over and settling."

"That I don't know for certain yet, and I must own I was waiting to ask your advice. Well, what grounds have I for keeping her?"

"Bah, that's nothing, as a servant if you like."

"Please don't speak so loud. Though she's ill she's quite conscious, and I noticed she seemed to start when she saw you. That means she remembered yesterday."

Then I told him about her behaviour and everything I had noticed in her. Masloboyev was interested in what I told him. I added that perhaps I would place her in a family I knew, and told him briefly about my old friends. To my astonishment he knew something of Natasha's story, and when I asked him how he had heard of it, he said:

"Oh, I heard something about it long ago in connection with some business. I've told you already that I know Prince Valkovsky. That's a good idea of yours to send her to those old people. She'd only be in your way. And

another thing, she wants some sort of a passport. Don't you worry about that. I'll see to it. Good-bye. Come and see me often. Is she asleep now?"

"I think so," I answered.

But as soon as he had gone Yelena called to me.

"Who was that?" she asked. Her voice shook, but she looked at me with the same intent and somewhat haughty expression. I can find no other word for it.

I told her Maslobojev's name, and said that it was through him I got her away from Bubnova's, and that Bubnova was very much afraid of him. Her cheeks suddenly flushed fiery red—no doubt at the memory of the previous night.

"And now she will never come here?" asked Yelena, with a searching look at me.

I hastened to reassure her. She grew silent, and took my hand in her burning fingers, but she dropped it again at once as though recollecting herself.

"It cannot be that she really feels such an aversion for me," I thought. "It's her manner or it's just . . . it's just that the poor little thing has had so much unhappiness that she trusts no one in the world now."

At the hour fixed I went out to fetch the medicine, and at the same time went into a restaurant where they knew me and gave me credit. I took a canteen with me, and brought back some chicken broth for Yelena. But she would not eat, and the soup remained on the stove for the time being.

I gave her her medicine and sat down to my work. I thought she was asleep, but chancing to look round at her I saw that she had raised her head, and was intently watching me write. I pretended not to notice her.

At last she really did fall asleep, and to my great relief she slept quietly without delirium or moaning. I fell into a reverie. Natasha, not knowing what was the matter, might well be angry with me for not coming today, and I

thought she would even feel hurt at my neglect, just when she needed me most, perhaps. She might at this moment have special worries, perhaps some service to ask of me, and as ill luck would have it I wasn't there.

As for Anna Andreyevna, I was completely at a loss as to how I should excuse myself to her next day. I thought and thought and suddenly made up my mind to run round to both of them. I should only be absent about two hours. Yelena was asleep and would not hear me go out. I jumped up, took my coat and cap, but just as I was going out Yelena called me. I was surprised. Could she have been feigning sleep?

I may remark in parenthesis that, although Yelena made a show of not wanting to speak to me, these rather frequent appeals, this desire to apply to me whenever she was in doubt, proved the contrary, and I confess it really pleased me.

"Where do you mean to send me?" she asked when I came up. She had a way of asking her questions suddenly when I least expected them. This time I did not take in her meaning at first.

"You were telling your friend just now that you meant to place me in someone's home. I don't want to go anywhere."

I bent down to her; she was hot all over, another attack of fever had come on. I began to comfort and soothe her, assuring her that if she cared to remain with me I would not send her away anywhere. Saying this I took off my coat and cap. I could not bring myself to leave her alone in such a condition.

"No, go," she said, realizing at once that I was meaning to stay. "I'm sleepy; I shall go to sleep directly."

"But how can you stay all alone?" I said, uncertainly. "Though I'd be sure to be back in two hours' time. . . ."

"Well, go then. Suppose I'm ill for a whole year, you can't stay at home all that time." And she tried to smile,

and looked strangely at me as though struggling with some kindly feeling stirring in her heart. Poor little one! Her gentle, tender heart showed itself in glimpses in spite of her aloofness and evident bitterness.

First I hurried to Anna Andreyevna. She was waiting for me with feverish impatience and met me with reproaches; she was terribly upset. Nikolai Sergeich had gone out immediately after dinner, and she did not know where. I had a feeling that she had not been able to resist telling him everything, in hints, of course, as she always did. She practically admitted it herself, telling me that she could not help sharing such joyful tidings with him, but that Nikolai Sergeich had become, to use her expression, "black as thunder," and had said nothing. "He wouldn't speak, wouldn't even answer my questions, and suddenly after dinner had got up and gone out." Anna Andreyevna was almost trembling with fright as she told me this, and begged me to stay with her until Nikolai Sergeich returned. I excused myself and told her almost flatly that perhaps I should not come next day either, and that I had really hurried to her now to tell her so; this time we almost quarrelled. She began to cry, reproached me harshly and bitterly, and only when I was practically at the door she suddenly threw herself on my neck, held me tight in both arms and asked me not to be angry with a lonely poor woman like her, and not to mind her words.

Contrary to my expectations, I found Natasha alone again. And, strange to say, it seemed to me that she was by no means so pleased to see me as she had been the day before or on any other occasion; as though I were in the way or were somehow annoying her. When I asked whether Alyosha had been there that day she answered:

"Of course he has, but he didn't stay long. He promised to look in this evening," she went on, hesitating.

"And was he here last night?"

"N-no. He was detained," she added quickly. "Well, Vanya, how are things going with you?"

I saw that she wanted to stave off our conversation and change the subject. I gave her a keener glance; she was evidently upset. But noticing that I was studying her and watching her closely, she flashed a look at me that was wrathful, and so intense that her eyes seemed to scorch me. "She is miserable again," I thought, "but she doesn't want to speak to me about it."

In answer to her question I told her the whole story of Yelena in full detail. She was extremely interested and even impressed by my story.

"Good heavens! And you could leave her alone, and ill!" she cried.

I told her that I had not meant to come at all that day, but that I was afraid she would be angry with me and that she might be in need of me.

"Need," she said to herself, thinking something over. "Perhaps I do need you, Vanya, but that had better be another time. Have you been to my people?"

I told her.

"Yes, God only knows how my father will take all these new developments now. Though what is there to take after all?..."

"What do you mean: 'what is there to take'?" I repeated. "An upheaval like this!"

"I don't know about that. Where can he have gone again? That other time, you thought he had been to see me. Look here, Vanya, come to me tomorrow if you can. I may tell you something then. Only I'm ashamed to trouble you. But now you'd better be going home to your guest. I expect it's two hours since you came out."

"Yes, it is. Good-bye, Natasha. Well, and how was Alyosha with you today?"

"Oh, Alyosha. All right. . . . Your curiosity really surprises me."

"Good-bye for now, my friend."

"Good-bye."

She gave me her hand somewhat casually and turned away from my last, farewell look. I went out feeling rather bewildered. "But of course she has plenty to think about," I thought. "It's no jesting matter. Tomorrow she'll be the first to tell me all about it."

I was depressed when I returned home, and was dreadfully shocked as soon as I opened the door. By now it was dark. I could make out Yelena sitting on the sofa, her head sunk on her breast as though plunged in deep thought. She did not even glance at me. She seemed lost to everything. I went up to her. She was muttering something to herself. "Can she be delirious?" I thought.

"Yelena, my dear, what's the matter?" I asked, sitting down beside her and putting my arm round her.

"I want to go away. . . . I'd rather go to her," she said, not raising her head to look at me.

"Where? To whom?" I asked in surprise.

"To her. To Bubnova. She's always saying I owe her a lot of money; that she had Mamma buried at her expense. I don't want her to say nasty things about Mamma. I want to work for her, and pay it all back to her. Then I'll leave her myself. But now I'm going back to her again."

"Be quiet, Yelena, you can't go back to her," I said. "She'll torment you. She'll ruin you."

"Let her ruin me, let her torment me," Yelena caught up the words passionately. "I'm not the first. Others better than I are tormented. A beggar woman in the street told me that. I'm poor and I want to be poor. I'll be poor all my life; that's what my mother willed me when she was dying. I'll work. I don't want to wear this dress."

"I'll buy you another one tomorrow. And I'll get you your books too; you shall stay with me. I won't let

anyone take you unless you want it yourself; don't worry now."

"I'll be a housemaid!"

"Very well, very well. Only be quiet. Lie down, try and sleep."

But the poor child burst into tears. By degrees her tears passed into sobs. I didn't know what to do with her. I offered her water and moistened her temples and her head. At last she fell back on the sofa completely exhausted, and began shivering feverishly again. I wrapped her up in what I could find and she fell into an uneasy sleep, starting and waking up continually. Though I had not walked far that day, I was awfully tired, and I decided to go to bed as early as possible. Tormenting doubts swarmed in my brain. I foresaw that I should have a lot of trouble with this child. But my chief anxiety was about Natasha and her troubles. Altogether as I remember it now I have rarely been in such a dejected mood as when I fell asleep that unhappy night.

CHAPTER IX

I woke up late, at about ten o'clock in the morning, quite ill. I felt giddy and my head was aching; I glanced towards Yelena's bed. The bed was empty. At the same moment from my little room on the right sounds reached me as though someone were sweeping with a broom. I went to have a look. Yelena had a broom in her hand, and holding up her pretty frock which she had been wearing ever since that evening, was sweeping the floor. The wood for the stove was stacked in the corner. The table had been dusted, the kettle cleaned. In a word, Yelena was doing the housework.

"I say, Yelena," I cried, "who wants you to sweep the floor? I don't wish it, you're ill. Have you come here to be a drudge for me?"

"But who is going to sweep the floor here?" she answered, drawing herself up, and looking straight at me. "I'm not ill now."

"But I didn't take you to make you work, Yelena. You seem to be afraid I shall reproach you like Bubnova for living with me for nothing. And where did you get that horrid broom? I had no broom," I added, looking at her in wonder.

"It's my broom. I brought it here myself. I used to sweep the floor here for Grandfather, too. And the broom's been lying here ever since under the stove."

I went back to the other room, musing. I may have been in error, but it seemed to me that she felt oppressed by my hospitality and that she wanted in every possible way to show me that she was doing something for her living. "What an embittered character," I thought.

A minute or two later she came in and without a word sat down on the sofa in the same place as yesterday, looking inquisitively at me. Meanwhile I had the kettle boiling. I made the tea, poured out a cup for her and handed it to her with a slice of white bread. She took it silently and meekly. She had hardly eaten anything for twenty-four hours.

"See, you've dirtied your nice dress with that broom," I said, noticing a streak of dirt on her skirt.

She looked down and suddenly, to my intense astonishment, she put down her cup, and apparently calm and composed, she picked up a breadth of the muslin skirt in both hands and with one rip tore it from top to bottom. When she had done this she raised her stubborn, flashing eyes to me in silence. Her face was pale.

"What are you doing, Yelena?" I cried, feeling sure the child was mad.

"It's an evil dress," she muttered, almost breathless with excitement. "Why do you say it's a nice dress? I don't want to wear it!" she cried suddenly, jumping up

from her place. "I'll tear it up. I didn't ask her to dress me up. She did it herself, by force. I've torn one dress already. I'll tear this one too! I'll tear it, I'll tear it, I'll tear it!..."

And she fell upon her luckless dress with fury. In one moment she had torn it almost into rags. When she had finished she was so pale she could hardly stand. I gazed with astonishment at such rage, while she looked at me with a defiant air as though I too had somehow offended her. But now I knew what I had to do.

I made up my mind to buy her a new dress that very morning. This wild, embittered little creature must be tamed by kindness. She appeared never to have met anyone kind before. If once already in spite of severe punishment she had torn a similar dress to rags, with what hatred she must regard this one now, when it recalled to her those awful recent moments.

In the second-hand market one could buy a simple, pretty dress very cheaply. The trouble was that at the moment I had scarcely any money. But as I went to bed the night before I had made up my mind to go that morning to a place where I had hopes of getting some, and it was on the way to the market, too. I took my hat. Yelena watched me intently as though expecting something.

"Are you going to lock me in again?" she asked when I took up the key to lock the door behind me, as I had done the day before and the day before that.

"My dear friend," I said, going up to her. "Don't be angry at that. I lock the door because someone might come. You are ill, and you'd perhaps be frightened. And there's no knowing who might not come! What if it should be Bubnova...."

I did not really mean that. I locked her in because I didn't trust her. I was afraid that she might suddenly take it into her head to leave me. I was determined to be

cautious for a time. Yelena said nothing and I locked her in again.

I knew a publisher who had been engaged in bringing out a many-volumed compilation for over two years now. I often used to get work from him when I was in need of a quickly earned fee. He paid regularly. I applied to him, and he gave me twenty-five rubles in advance, engaging me to compile an article by the end of the week. But I hoped to make up the time on my novel later. I often did this when I was hopelessly hard up.

Having got the money I set off to the market. There I soon found an old woman I knew who sold old clothes of all sorts. I gave her Yelena's size approximately, and she instantly picked me out a light-coloured cotton dress priced extremely cheaply, though it was almost as good as new and had not been washed more than once. While I was about it I took a neckerchief too. As I paid for them I reflected that Yelena would need a coat, mantle, or something of that kind. The weather was cold and she had absolutely nothing at all. But I put off that purchase for another time. Yelena was so proud and so ready to take offence. Goodness knows, I thought, how she'll take this dress even though I purposely chose the most ordinary garment, as plain and modest as possible. I did, however, buy her two pairs of thread stockings and one pair of woollen. Those I could give her on the ground that she was ill and that it was cold in the room. She would need underclothes too. But all that I left till I should get to know her better. Then I bought some old curtains for the bed. They were a necessity and might please Yelena very much.

It was already one o'clock in the afternoon. My key turned almost noiselessly in the lock, so that when I returned home with all these things Yelena did not at once hear me come in. I noticed that she had been standing at the table turning over my books and papers. On hearing

me come in she hurriedly closed the book she was reading, and moved away from the table, flushing all over. I glanced at the book; it was my first novel, published in book form, with my name on the title-page.

"Some one knocked while you were away!" she said in a tone which seemed to tease me for having locked her in.

"Perhaps it was the doctor," I said. "Didn't you call to him, Yelena?"

"No!"

I said no more, but put down my parcel, untied it, and took out the dress I had bought.

"Here, Yelena, my friend!" I said coming up to her. "You can't go about in such rags as you've got on now. So I've bought you a dress, an everyday one, one of the cheapest, so there's no need for you to worry about it. It only cost one ruble twenty kopeks. Wear it with my best wishes."

I put the dress down beside her. She flushed crimson and gazed at me for some time, wide eyed.

She was extremely surprised and at the same time it seemed to me that she was horribly ashamed for some reason. But a light, soft and tender, kindled in her eyes. Seeing that she said nothing I turned away to the table. What I had done had evidently impressed her, but she controlled herself with an effort, and sat with her eyes cast down.

My head was spinning and aching more and more. The fresh air had done me no good at all. Meanwhile I had to go to Natasha's. My anxiety about her had not lessened since yesterday, on the contrary, it grew stronger and stronger. Suddenly I fancied that Yelena called me. I turned to her.

"Don't lock me in when you go out," she said, looking away and picking at the border of the sofa, as though she were entirely absorbed in this. "I will not go away from you."

"Very well, Yelena, I agree. But what if some stranger comes? There's no knowing who may!"

"Then leave me the key and I'll lock myself in and if they knock I shall say, 'not at home'."

And she looked slyly at me as much as to say: "See how simply that's done."

"Who does your washing?" she asked suddenly, before I had had time to answer her.

"There's a woman here, in this house."

"I can wash clothes. And where did you get the food yesterday?"

"At a restaurant."

"I can cook, too. I will do the cooking for you."

"Come, come, Yelena. What can you know about cooking? You're talking nonsense...."

Yelena relapsed into silence and dropped her eyes. She was evidently wounded at my remark. Ten minutes at least passed. We were both silent.

"Soup!" she said suddenly, without raising her head.

"What do you mean—soup? What soup?" I asked, surprised.

"I can make soup. I used to make it for Mamma when she was ill. I used to go to market too."

"See, Yelena, just see how proud you are," I said, going up to her and sitting down beside her on the sofa. "I treat you as my heart prompts me. You are all alone, without relations, and unhappy. I want to help you. You'd help me in the same way if I were in trouble. But you won't look at it like that, and it's disagreeable to you to take the smallest present from me. You want to pay for it at once, to earn it as though I were Bubnova and would reproach you with it. If that is so, you ought to be ashamed, Yelena."

She made no reply. Her lips twitched. I believe she wanted to say something; but she controlled herself and kept silent. I got up to go to Natasha. This time I left

the key with Yelena, telling her if anybody should come and knock, to call out and ask who was there. I felt perfectly sure that something very unpleasant had happened to Natasha, and that she was keeping it dark from me for the time, as she had done more than once before. In any case I resolved to look in for a moment only for fear of irritating her by my importunity.

And it turned out I was right. She met me again with a look of harsh displeasure. I ought to have left her at once but my legs were giving way under me.

"I've only come for a minute, Natasha," I began, "to ask your advice about what am I to do with my guest."

And I began telling her quickly all about Yelena. Natasha listened to me in silence.

"I don't know what to advise you, Vanya," she said. "Everything goes to show that she's a very strange little creature. Perhaps she has been dreadfully ill-treated and frightened. Give her time to get well, anyway. Do you want to place her with my people?"

"She keeps saying that she won't go anywhere away from me. And goodness knows how they'll take her, so I don't know what to do. Well, tell me, dear, how you are. You didn't seem quite well yesterday," I said timidly.

"No. . . my head aches rather today, too," she answered absent-mindedly. "Have you seen either one of them today?"

"No. I shall go tomorrow. Tomorrow's Saturday, you know."

"Well, what of it?"

"The prince is coming in the evening."

"Well? I've not forgotten."

"No, I only. . . ."

She stood still, exactly opposite me, and gave me a long and earnest look. There was an expression of determination, of obstinacy in her eyes, something feverish and overwrought.

"Look here, Vanya," she said, "do me a favour, leave me, you're terribly in my way."

I got up from my chair and looked at her, unutterably astonished.

"Natasha, dear, what is the matter? What has happened?" I cried in alarm.

"Nothing's happened. You'll know all about it tomorrow, but now I want to be alone. Do you hear, Vanya? Go away at once. I can't bear it, I can't bear to look at you!"

"But tell me at least. . . ."

"You'll know everything, everything tomorrow! Oh, my God! Aren't you ever going?"

I went out. I was so staggered that I hardly knew what I was doing. Mavra hurried out into the passage after me.

"Angry, is she?" she asked me. "I'm afraid to go near her."

"But what's the matter with her?"

"Why, our young gentleman hasn't shown his nose here for the last three days!"

"What do you mean—three days?" I repeated in amazement. "Why, she told me herself yesterday that he had been here in the morning and was coming again in the evening."

"In the evening, indeed! He never came near us in the morning either! I tell you we haven't set eyes on him for three days. You don't say she told you herself that he'd been in the morning?"

"Yes, she did."

"Well," said Mavra, musing, "it must have cut her to the quick if she won't own it even to you. Well, he's a pretty one!"

"But what does it mean? I cried.

"It means that I don't know what to do with her," said Mavra, with a gesture of dismay. "She was going to send me to him yesterday, but twice she turned me back as I

was starting. And today she won't even speak to me. Perhaps you could go and see him. I daren't leave her now."

I rushed down the staircase, beside myself with agitation.

"Will you come this evening?" Mavra called after me.

"We'll see," I called up to her. "I may just drop in and ask you how she is. If only I'm alive myself."

I really felt as though a blow had been dealt to my very heart.

CHAPTER X

I went straight to Alyosha's. He lived with his father in Malaya Morskaya. Prince Valkovsky had a rather large apartment, although he lived alone. Alyosha occupied two splendid rooms in it. I had very rarely been to see him, in fact only once before, I believe. He had come to see me much oftener, especially at first, during the early period of his connection with Natasha.

He was not at home. I went straight to his rooms and wrote him the following note:

"Alyosha, you seem to have gone out of your mind. Seeing that on Tuesday evening your father himself asked Natasha to do you the honour of becoming your wife, and you were glad of his request, to which I bear witness, you must admit that your present behaviour is somewhat strange. Do you know what you are doing to Natasha? In any case this note will remind you that your behaviour towards your future wife is unworthy and frivolous in the extreme. I am very well aware that I have no right to lecture you, but I disregard this entirely.

"P.S. She knows nothing about this letter, and in fact it was not she who told me about you."

I sealed up the letter and left it on his table. In answer to my question the servant said that Alexei Petrovich was

hardly ever at home, and that he would not be back now till the small hours of the morning.

I barely managed to reach home. I was overcome with giddiness, and my legs were weak and trembling. My door was unlocked. Nikolai Sergeich Ikhmenev was there waiting for me. He was sitting at the table watching Yelena in silent wonder, and she, too, was watching him with no less wonder, though she was obstinately silent. "He must think her queer. I shouldn't be surprised," I thought.

"Well, my boy, I've been waiting for you for a good hour, and I must confess I had never expected to find things . . . like this," he went on, looking round the room, with a scarcely perceptible nod towards Yelena.

His face expressed his astonishment. But looking at him more closely I noticed in him signs of agitation and distress. He was paler than usual.

"Sit down, sit down," he said with a preoccupied and flustered air. "I've been anxious to see you about something, so I hurried along to you. But what's the matter? You don't look yourself."

"I'm not well. I've been feeling dizzy all day."

"Well, mind, you don't neglect that. Have you caught cold or what?"

"No, it's simply a nervous attack. I sometimes have them. But what about yourself, how are you?"

"I'm all right, I'm all right, it's only the excitement. I've something to tell you. Sit down."

I moved a chair over and sat down at the table, facing him. The old man bent forward to me, and said in a half whisper:

"Mind, don't look at her, but pretend we are speaking of something else; what sort of visitor is this you've got here?"

"I'll explain it all to you later, Nikolai Sergeich. This poor girl is absolutely alone in the world. She's the

granddaughter of that old Smith who used to live here and died at the confectioner's."

"Oh, so he had a granddaughter, did he! Well, my boy, she's a queer one! How she stares, how she stares! I'll tell you straight, if you hadn't come in I couldn't have stood it another five minutes. First she wouldn't open the door, and then she wouldn't utter a word in all this time! It's quite uncanny; she's not like a human being. But how did she come here? Oh, I see, I suppose she came to see her grandfather, not knowing he was dead?"

"Yes, she has suffered a great deal. The old man thought of her when he was dying."

"Hm! She seems to take after her grandfather. You'll tell me all about that later. Perhaps we could help her somehow, in some way, if that's how it is. But now, my boy, can't you tell her to go away, for I want to talk to you of something serious."

"But she's nowhere to go. She lives here."

I explained in a few words as far as I could, adding that he could speak before her, that she was only a child.

"To be sure . . . she's a child. But you have astonished me, my boy. She's staying with you! Good heavens!"

And the old man looked at her again in amazement.

Yelena, feeling that we were talking about her, sat silent, with lowered head, picking at the edge of the sofa with her fingers. She had already put on her new dress, which fitted her perfectly. Her hair had been brushed more carefully than usual, perhaps in honour of the new dress. I should say that if it had not been for the strange wildness of her expression, she would have been a very pretty child.

"To get to the point, that's what I have to tell you," the old man began again. "It's a long business, an important business."

He sat looking down, with a grave and meditative air, and in spite of his haste and his "getting to the point,"

he could find no words to begin. "What's coming?" I wondered.

"You see, Vanya, I've come to you to ask a very great favour. But first . . . as I now realize it myself, I should explain to you certain circumstances . . . very delicate circumstances."

He cleared his throat and stole a look at me; looked and flushed red; flushed and was angry with himself for his awkwardness; in his anger he found determination.

"Well, what is there to explain! You understand yourself! The long and short of it is, I am challenging Prince Valkovsky to a duel, and I beg you to make the arrangements and be my second."

I fell back in my chair and gazed at him, dumbfounded.

"Well, what are you staring at? I've not gone out of my mind, you know."

"But, forgive me, Nikolai Sergeich! On what pretext? With what object? And, in fact, how is it possible?"

"Pretext! Object!" cried the old man. "That's good!"

"Very well, very well. I know what you'll say; but what good will you do by your action? What will be gained by the duel? I must own I don't understand anything at all."

"I thought you wouldn't. Now listen, our lawsuit is over (that is, it will be over in a few days. There are only a few formalities left). I have lost the case. I have to pay as much as ten thousand; that's the decree of the court. Ikhmenevka is the security for it. And therefore now this vile man is secure of his money, and I, after giving up Ikhmenevka and paying him up, become a free man. Now I can hold up my head and say: 'You've been insulting me, Your Excellency, for the last two years; you have sullied my name and the honour of my family, and I have been obliged to bear it all! I could not then challenge you to a duel. You'd have said openly then: 'Aha,

you cunning fellow, you want to kill me in order not to pay me the money which you foresee you'll be sentenced to pay sooner or later. No, first let's see how the case ends and then you can challenge me." Now, honoured prince, the case is settled, you are secure, there are no difficulties any more, and therefore will you be pleased to meet me at the barrier?' That's what I have to say to you. Well, do you think I haven't the right to avenge myself at last, for everything, for everything?"

His eyes flashed. I looked at him for a long time without speaking. I wanted to penetrate to his secret thought.

"Listen, Nikolai Sergeich," I said at last, making up my mind to speak out on the real point without which we could not understand each other. "Can you be perfectly frank with me?"

"I can," he answered firmly.

"Tell me plainly. Is it only the feeling of revenge that prompts you to challenge him, or have you other objects in view?"

"Vanya," he answered, "you know that I allow no one to touch on certain points with me, but I'll make an exception in the present case. For you, with your clear insight, have seen at once that we can't avoid the point. Yes, I have another aim. That aim is to save my lost daughter and to rescue her from the path of ruin to which recent events are driving her now."

"But how will you save her by this duel? That is the question."

"By hindering all that is being plotted among them now. Listen: don't imagine that I am actuated by fatherly tenderness or any weakness of that sort. All that's nonsense! I don't display my inmost heart to anyone. Even you don't know it. My daughter has abandoned me, has left my house with a lover, and I have cast her out of my heart—I cast her out once and for all that very evening—you remember? If you have seen me sobbing over

her portrait, it doesn't yet follow that I want to forgive her. I did not forgive her then. I wept for my lost happiness, for my shattered dream, but not for *her* as she is now. Perhaps I often weep. I'm not ashamed to own it, just as I'm not ashamed to own that I once loved my child more than anything on earth. All this seems to belie my conduct now. You may say to me: 'If it is so, if you are indifferent to the fate of her whom you no longer look on as a daughter, why do you interfere in what they are plotting there?' I will answer: in the first place because I do not want to let that base and crafty man triumph, and secondly, because of the most ordinary humanity. Even if she's no longer my daughter she is still a weak creature, defenceless and deceived, who is being still more deceived, that she may be utterly ruined. I can't meddle directly, but indirectly, by a duel, I can. If I am killed, or my blood is shed, surely she won't step over our barrier, perhaps over my corpse, and stand at the altar beside the son of my murderer, like the daughter of that king (remember the book we had, the one you learnt to read by?) who rode in her chariot over her father's body? And, besides, if it comes to a duel, our princes won't care for the marriage themselves. In short, I don't want this marriage to take place, and I'll do everything I can to prevent it. Do you understand me now?"

"No. If you wish Natasha well, how can you deliberately hinder her marriage, that is, the one thing that can rehabilitate her good name? She has all her life before her; she will have need of her good name."

"She shouldn't give a damn for the opinion of the world. That's how she ought to look at it. She ought to realize that the supreme disgrace for her lies in that marriage, in her very connection with those vile people, with that paltry society. A noble pride—that should be her answer to the world. Then perhaps I, too, will consent to

hold out a hand to her, and we shall see who dares defame my child!"

Such extravagant idealism amazed me. But I saw at once that he was not himself and was speaking in anger.

"This is too idealistic," I answered, "and therefore cruel. You're demanding of her a strength which perhaps you did not give her at her birth. And is she consenting to this marriage because she wants to be a princess? Why, she's in love; it's passion; it's fate. And moreover, you demand of her a contempt for public opinion while you bow down before it yourself! The prince has insulted you, has publicly accused you of a base scheme to ally yourself with his princely house, and now you are reasoning that if she refuses them now, after a formal offer of marriage has been made by them, it will certainly be the fullest and plainest refutation of the old calumny. That's what you are after; you are deferring to the opinion of the prince himself, and you're striving to make him admit his mistake. You're longing to make him an object of ridicule, to revenge yourself on him, and for that you will sacrifice your daughter's happiness. Isn't that egoism?"

The old man sat morose and frowning, and for a long time he answered not a word.

"You're unjust to me, Vanya," he said at last, and a tear glistened on his eyelashes. "I swear you are unjust. But let us leave that! I cannot turn my heart inside out before you," he went on, getting up and taking his hat. "One thing I will say—you spoke just now of my daughter's happiness. I have absolutely and literally no faith in that happiness. Besides, the marriage will never come off, apart from my interference."

"But why? What makes you think so? Perhaps you know something?" I cried with curiosity.

"No. I know nothing special. But that cursed fox can never have brought himself to such a thing. It's all nonsense, all a trap. I'm convinced of that, and, mark my

words, it will turn out so. And secondly, even if this marriage did take place, which could only happen if that scoundrel had some special, mysterious interests to be served by it—interests which no one knows anything about, and I'm utterly at a loss to fathom—tell me, ask your own heart, will she be happy in that marriage? Reproaches and humiliations, with a mere boy for a life partner who is weary of her love already, and who will begin to neglect her, insult her, and humiliate her as soon as he marries her; the strength of her passion unabating while his grows cooler; jealousy, tortures, hell, divorce, perhaps crime itself. . . . No, Vanya! If that's what you are concocting there, and you have a hand in it, I warn you you'll have to answer to God for it, but it will be too late then! Good-bye."

I stopped him.

"Look here, Nikolai Sergeich, let us decide to wait a bit. Rest assured that more than one pair of eyes is watching over this affair, and perhaps it will be settled of itself in the best possible way without any violent or artificial interference, such as this duel, for instance. Time is the very best arbiter. And, finally, let me tell you, your whole plan is utterly impossible. Could you for a moment suppose that Prince Valkovsky would accept your challenge?"

"Not accept it? What do you mean by that?"

"I swear he wouldn't; and believe me, he'd find a perfectly satisfactory way out of it; he would do it all with pedantic dignity and meanwhile you would be an object of derision."

"Upon my word, my boy, upon my word! You simply stagger me! How could he refuse to accept it? No, Vanya, you're simply a romancer, a regular romancer! Why, do you think it's beneath his dignity to fight a duel with me, eh? I'm just as good as he is. I'm an old man, an insulted father. You're a Russian author, and therefore a respect-

able person, too, you can be a second and . . . and . . . I fail to see what more you can want”

“Well, you’ll see. He’ll bring forward such excuses that you’ll be the first to find that it will be utterly impossible for you to fight him.”

“Hm! . . . very well, my friend. Have it your own way! I’ll wait, for a certain time, that is. We’ll see what time will do. But one thing, my friend, give me your word of honour that you’ll not speak of this conversation there, nor to Anna Andreyevna.”

“I promise.”

“Do me another favour, Vanya, never talk to me on the subject again.”

“Very well. I promise.”

“And one more request: I know, my dear, that it’s dull for you perhaps, but come and see us as often as ever you can. My poor Anna Andreyevna is so fond of you, and . . . and . . . she’s so wretched without you You understand, Vanya.”

And he pressed my hand warmly. I promised him with all my heart.

“And now, Vanya, the last delicate question. Have you any money?”

“Money?” I repeated with surprise.

“Yes.” (And the old man flushed and looked away.) “I look at you, my boy, at your lodgings . . . at your circumstances . . . and when I think that you may have other, unforeseen expenses (and now is just the time you might have them) it Here, my boy, a hundred and fifty rubles, something to have handy”

“A hundred and fifty! Something to have handy when you’ve just lost your case!”

“Vanya, I see you didn’t understand me at all! You may have *unforeseen* expenses, try and understand. In some cases money helps to an independent position, an independent decision. Perhaps you don’t need it now, but

won't you need it for something in the future? In any case I shall leave it with you. It's all I've been able to get together. If you don't spend it you'll return it. And now good-bye. My God, how pale you are! Why, you're quite ill...."

I took the money without protest. It was quite clear why he left it with me.

"I can scarcely stand up," I answered.

"You must take care of yourself, Vanya, my boy, you must! Don't go out today. I shall tell Anna Andreyevna what a state you're in. Oughtn't you to have a doctor? I'll come and see how you are tomorrow; at least I'll try my best to come, if my legs will still carry me. Now you'd better lie down.... Well, good-bye. Good-bye little girl; she's turned her back! See here, my friend, here's another five rubles. That's for the child. Don't tell her I gave it, of course. Just spend it on her, well ... shoes, or underclothes or something. Good-bye, dear friend."

I saw him as far as the gate. I had to ask the porter to go out to get some food for me. Yelena had had no dinner yet.

CHAPTER XI

But as soon as I came back my head began to spin and I fell down in the middle of the room. I remember nothing but Yelena's shriek. She flung up her hands and rushed to support me. That is the last moment that remains in my memory....

When I regained consciousness I found myself in bed. Yelena told me afterwards that with the help of the porter, who had brought our food, she had carried me to the sofa.

I waked up several times, and always saw Yelena's compassionate and anxious little face leaning over me. But I remember all this as in a dream, as through a mist,

and the dear face of the poor child came to me in glimpses, through my stupor, like a vision, a picture. She brought me something to drink, arranged my bed-clothes, or sat looking at me, distressed and frightened, smoothing my hair down with her fingers. Once I remember her gentle kiss on my face. Another time suddenly waking up in the night, I saw—by the light of the smouldering candle that had been set on a little table by my bedside—Yelena with her face on my pillow, her warm cheek resting on her hand, and her pale lips half parted in an uneasy sleep. But it was not until early next morning that I fully regained consciousness. The candle had burnt out completely. The vivid rosy beams of early sunrise were already playing on the wall. Yelena was sitting at the table, fast asleep, with her tired head pillowed on her left arm, and I remember I gazed a long time at her childish face, full, even in sleep, of an unchildlike sadness and a sort of strange sickly beauty. It was pale, with long eyelashes, lying on her thin cheeks, framed with pitch-black hair that fell thick and heavy in a careless knot on one side. Her other hand lay on my pillow. Very softly, I kissed that thin little hand. But the poor child did not wake; only a faint glimmer of a smile seemed to touch her pale lips. I went on gazing at her, and so quietly fell into a sound healing sleep. This time I slept almost till midday. When I woke up I felt almost well again. A feeling of weakness and heaviness in my limbs was the only trace left of my illness. I had had such sudden nervous attacks before; I knew them very well. The illness generally passed off within twenty-four hours, but it was acute and violent while it lasted.

It was nearly midday. The first thing I saw were the curtains I had bought the day before, stretched on a cord across the corner. Yelena had screened off the corner as a separate room for herself. She was sitting before the stove waiting for the kettle to boil. Noticing that I

was awake she smiled cheerfully and at once came up to me.

"Dear child," I said, taking her hand, "you've been looking after me all night. I didn't know you were so kind."

"And how do you know I've been looking after you? Perhaps I've been asleep all night," she said, looking at me with bashful and good-humoured slyness, and at the same time blushing shyly at her own words.

"I woke up several times and saw you. You only fell asleep at daybreak."

"Would you like some tea?" she interrupted, as though feeling it difficult to continue the conversation, as all modest and sternly truthful people are apt to when they are being praised.

"Yes, please," I answered, "but did you have any dinner yesterday?"

"I had no dinner but I had some supper. The porter brought it. But don't talk. Lie still. You're not quite well yet," she added, bringing me some tea and sitting down on my bed.

"Lie still, indeed! I will lie still, though, till it gets dark, and then I'm going out. I really must, Lenchka."

"Oh, you must, must you! Who is it you're going to see? Not the gentleman who was here yesterday?"

"No, not him."

"Well, I'm glad it's not him. It was he upset you yesterday. To his daughter then?"

"What do you know about his daughter?"

"I heard everything yesterday," she answered, looking down. Her face clouded over. She frowned.

"He's a bad old man," she added.

"But you don't know him, do you? On the contrary, he's a very kind man."

"No, no, he's wicked. I heard," she said with fervour.

"Why, what did you hear?"

"He doesn't want to forgive his daughter. . . ."

"But he loves her. She is at fault with him; and he is anxious and worried about her."

"Why doesn't he forgive her then? If he does forgive her now, she shouldn't go back to him."

"But why? Why not?"

"Because he doesn't deserve that she should love him," she answered hotly. "Let her leave him for ever and let her rather go begging, and let him see his daughter begging, and be miserable."

Her eyes flashed and her cheeks glowed. "There must be something behind her words," I thought.

"Was it to his home you meant to send me?" she added after a pause.

"Yes, Yelena."

"No, I'd rather get a place as a servant."

"Ah, how wrong it all is what you're saying now, Lenchka! And what nonsense! Who would take you as a servant?"

"Any rustic," she answered impatiently, looking more and more downcast.

She was very hot-tempered.

"A rustic doesn't want a slip of a girl like you to work for him," I said, laughing.

"Well, a gentleman's family, then."

"As if you could live in a gentleman's family with your temper."

"I could."

The more irritated she became, the more abrupt were her answers.

"But you'd never stand it."

"Yes, I would. They'd scold me, but I'd say nothing on purpose. They'd beat me, but I wouldn't speak, I wouldn't speak. Let them beat me—I wouldn't cry for anything. They'd be sick with anger because I wasn't crying."

"Really, Yelena! What bitterness, and how proud you are! You must have been through a lot. . . ."

I got up and went to my big table. Yelena remained on the sofa, looking moodily at the floor, and picking at the edge of the sofa. She did not speak. I wondered whether she were angry at what I had said.

Standing by the table I absently opened the books I had brought the day before for the compilation, and gradually became absorbed in my reading. It often happens to me that I go and open a book to look up something, and become engrossed in my reading to the exclusion of everything else.

"What are you always writing?" Yelena asked with a timid smile, coming quietly to the table.

"All sorts of things, Lenchka. They give me money for it."

"Petitions?"

"No, not petitions."

And I explained to her as best I could that I wrote all sorts of stories about different people, and that these stories made up books which are called novels. She listened with great curiosity.

"And is it all true what you describe there?"

"No, I make it up."

"Why do you write what isn't true then?"

"Why, here, read this. You see this book; you've looked at it already. You can read, can't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you'll see then. I wrote this book."

"You? I'll read it."

She was evidently longing to say something, but found it difficult, and was in great excitement. Yet there was something behind her questions.

"And are you paid much for this?" she asked at last.

"Well, it varies. Sometimes a lot, sometimes nothing

at all, because my stories simply refuse to be written. It's difficult work, Lenchka."

"Then you're not rich?"

"No, not rich."

"Then I shall work and help you."

She glanced at me quickly, flushed, dropped her eyes, and taking two steps towards me suddenly threw her arms round me and pressed her face tightly against my breast; I looked at her with amazement.

"I love you . . . I'm not proud," she said. "You said I was proud yesterday. No, no, I'm not like that. I love you. You are the only person who cares for me. . . ."

But her tears choked her. A minute later they burst out with as much violence as the day before. She fell on her knees before me, kissed my hands, my feet. . . .

"You care for me!" she repeated. "You're the only one, the only one."

She embraced my knees convulsively. All the feeling which she had repressed for so long broke out at once in an uncontrollable outburst, and I came to understand the strange stubbornness of a heart chastely secreting itself for the time, and keeping all the harsher, more obstinate hold on itself, as the need for expression and utterance grew stronger till the inevitable outburst came, when the whole of it in its entirety would suddenly forget itself and give itself up to the craving for love, gratitude, affection and tears.

She sobbed till she became hysterical. With an effort I loosened her arms, lifted her up and carried her to the sofa. For a long time she went on sobbing, hiding her face in the pillow as though ashamed to look at me, but she clutched my hand tight, and kept it pressed to her heart.

Little by little she grew calmer, but still she did not raise her face to me. Once or twice her eyes flitted over my face, and there was a great softness, and a sort of

timorous and shrinking emotion in them. At last she flushed and smiled.

"Are you better?" I asked, "my sensitive little Lenochka, my sick little child!"

"Not Lenochka, no..." she whispered, still hiding her face from me.

"Not Lenochka? What then?"

"Nellie."

"Nellie? Why must it be Nellie? However, it's a very pretty name. I'll call you that if it's what you wish."

"That's what Mamma used to call me. And no one else has ever called me that, no one but she.... And I would not have anyone call me so but Mamma. But you do.... I want you to. I will always love you, always."

"A loving and proud little heart," I thought. "And how long it has taken me to win the right to call you Nellie!"

But now I knew her heart was devoted to me for ever.

"Nellie, listen," I said, as soon as she was calmer. "You've been telling me that no one has ever loved you but your mother. Is it really true your grandfather didn't love you?"

"No, he didn't."

"Yet you cried for him; do you remember, here, on the stairs?"

She thought a minute.

"No, he didn't love me. He was wicked." An emotion that was akin to pain shadowed her face.

"But he wasn't responsible for his actions, Nellie. His wits seemed to have quite deserted him. He even died like a madman. I told you how he died, didn't I?"

"Yes. But he had only begun to grow quite forgetful in the last month. He would sit here all day long, and if I didn't come to him he would sit on for two or three days without eating or drinking. He used to be much better before."

"What do you mean by 'before'?"

"Before Mamma died."

"Then it was you brought him food and drink, Nellie?"

"I, too."

"Where did you get it? From Bubnova?"

"No, I never took anything from Bubnova," she said emphatically, with a tremor in her voice.

"But where did you get it? You had nothing, had you?"

Nellie turned fearfully pale and said nothing; then she bent a long, long look upon me.

"I used to go out and beg in the streets. When I had five kopeks or so I would buy him bread and snuff."

"And he let you! Nellie! Nellie!"

"At first I did it without telling him. But when he found out he used to drive me out begging himself. I would stand on the bridge and beg of passers-by, and he would walk up and down near the bridge, waiting, and when he saw me given anything he'd pounce on me and snatch the money away, as though I wanted to hide it from him, and were not getting it for him."

As she said this she smiled a caustic, bitter sort of smile.

"All this was after Mamma had died," she added. "Then he seemed to have gone quite insane."

"So he must have loved your Mamma very much. How was it he didn't live with her?"

"No, he didn't love her. He was wicked and wouldn't forgive her . . . like that wicked old man yesterday," she said quietly, almost in a whisper, growing paler and paler.

I was startled. The plot of a whole drama seemed to flash before my eyes. That poor woman dying in a cellar at the coffin-maker's, her orphan child occasionally visiting the old grandfather who had cursed her mother, the queer crazed old man dying in the confectioner's shop after his dog had died.

"And Azorka used to be Mamma's dog," said Nellie suddenly, smiling at some reminiscence. "Grandfather

used to love Mamma very much before, and when Mamma went away from him she left her Azorka behind. And that's why he was so fond of Azorka. He didn't forgive Mamma, but when the dog died he died too," Nellie added harshly, and the smile vanished from her face.

"What was he in the old days, Nellie?" I asked her after a brief pause.

"He used to be rich. I don't know what he was," she answered. "He had some sort of factory. So Mamma told me. At first she thought I was too little and didn't tell me everything. She used to kiss me and say: 'You'll know everything, the time will come when you'll know everything, poor, unhappy child!' She was always calling me poor and unhappy. And sometimes at night when she thought I was asleep (though I was only pretending to be asleep on purpose) she'd cry and cry over me, she'd kiss me and say, 'Poor, unhappy child!'"

"What did your mother die of?"

"Of consumption, it's six weeks ago."

"And do you remember the time when your grandfather was rich?"

"But I wasn't born then. Mamma went away from Grandfather before I was born."

"But who did she go with?"

"I don't know," said Nellie softly, and musingly as it were. "She went abroad and I was born there."

"Abroad? Where?"

"In Switzerland. I've been everywhere. I've been in Italy and in Paris too."

I was surprised.

"And do you remember it, Nellie?"

"I remember a great deal."

"How is it you know Russian so well, Nellie?"

"Mamma used to teach me Russian even there. She was Russian because her mother was Russian. Grandfather was English, but he was just like a Russian too. And when

we came back here a year and a half ago I learnt it properly. Mamma was ill even then. We got poorer and poorer. Mamma was always crying. In the beginning she kept trying to find Grandfather here in Petersburg, and was always crying and saying that she had done him an injury. She cried so terribly! And when she learnt that Grandfather was poor she cried more than ever. She often wrote letters to him, but he never answered."

"Why did your mother come back here? Was it only to see her father?"

"I don't know. But our life was so good there!" And Nellie's eyes sparkled. "Mamma used to live alone, with me. She had a friend, a kind man like you. He used to know her before she went away. But he died out there and Mamma came back...."

"So it was with him that your mother went away from your grandfather?"

"No, not with him. Mother went away with someone else, and he left her."

"Who was he, Nellie?"

Nellie glanced at me and made no reply. She evidently knew the name of the man with whom her mother had gone away and who was probably her father. It hurt her to name him even to me.

I did not want to worry her with questions. Hers was a strange character, nervous and fiery, though she suppressed her impulses; lovable, though she entrenched herself behind a barrier of pride and reserve. Although she loved me with her whole heart, with the most candid and ingenuous love, almost as she had loved her dead mother, the very memory of whom caused her pain, yet all the while I knew her she was rarely open with me, and except on that day she seldom felt moved to speak to me of her past; rather the contrary, she was, as it were, austere reserved with me. But on that day through convulsive sobs of misery that interrupted her story, she told me in the

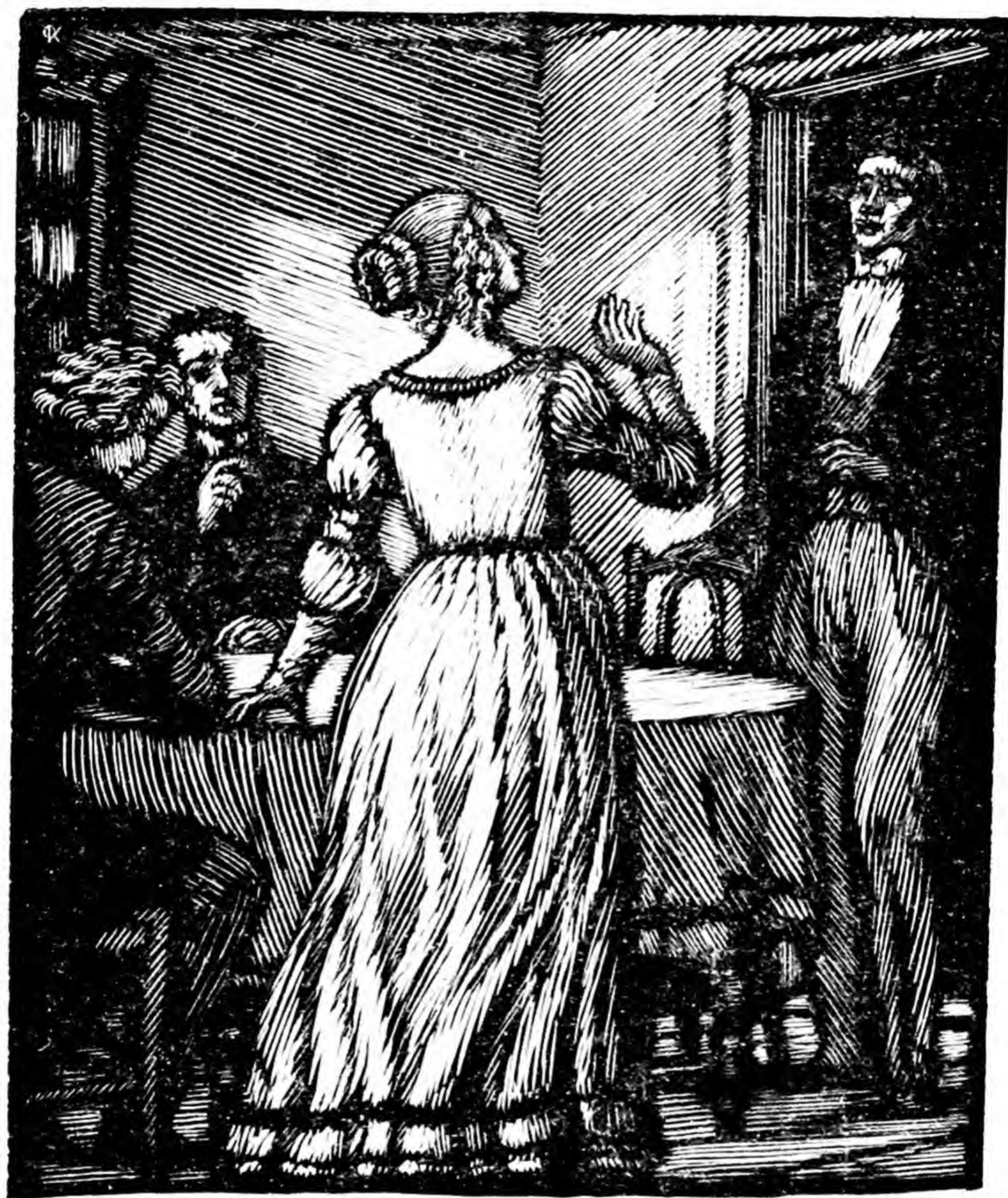
course of several hours all that most distressed and tortured her in her memories, and I shall never forget that fearful story, but the greater part of it, however, will be told later....

It was indeed a fearful story. It was the story of a woman abandoned and living on after the wreck of her happiness, sick, worn out and forsaken by everyone, rejected by the last being she could count on—her own father, once wronged by her and crazed by intolerable sufferings and humiliations. It was the story of a woman driven to despair, wandering through the cold, muddy streets of Petersburg, begging alms with the little girl whom she regarded as a baby; of a woman who lay dying for months in a damp cellar, while her father, who had refused to forgive her to the last moment of her life, relented at that last moment and came flying to forgive her only to find a cold corpse instead of the one he loved above everything on earth.

It was a strange story of the mysterious, hardly comprehensible relations of the mentally deranged old man with his little granddaughter who already understood him, who already, child though she was, understood many things that some men do not attain to in long years of their smooth and sheltered lives. It was a grim story, one of those grim and poignant dramas which are so often played out unseen, almost mysterious, under the heavy sky of Petersburg, in the dark secret corners of the vast city, in the midst of the giddy ferment of life, of dull égoism, of clashing interests, of gloomy vice and secret crimes, in that seething hell of a senseless and abnormal life....

But that story will be told later....

PART THREE



CHAPTER I

Twilight had long since fallen. It was night before I roused myself from the gloomy nightmare and came back to the present.

"Nellie," I said, "you're ill and upset now, yet I must leave you alone, in tears and distress. My friend! Forgive me, and let me tell you that there's someone else who has been loved and not forgiven, who is unhappy, wounded, and forsaken. She is expecting me. And I myself feel drawn to her now after your story, so much so that I feel I shan't be able to bear it if I don't see her at once, this very minute."

I don't know whether she understood all that I said. I was shaken both by her story and by my recent illness; but I rushed to Natasha's. It was late, past eight, when I arrived.

In the street I noticed a carriage at the gate of the house where Natasha lodged, and I fancied that it was the prince's carriage. The entry was across the courtyard. As soon as I began to mount the stairs I heard, a flight above me, someone carefully feeling his way, evidently unfamiliar with the place. I imagined this must be the prince, but I soon began to doubt it. The stranger kept grumbling and cursing the stairs as he climbed up, his language growing stronger and more violent as he proceeded. Of course the staircase was narrow, filthy, steep and never lighted; but the language I heard on the third floor was such that I could never have ascribed it to the prince: the ascending gentleman was swearing like a trooper. But there was a glimmer of light on the third floor; a little lamp was burning at Natasha's door. I overtook the stranger at the door, and what was my astonishment when I recognized him as Prince Valkovsky! He seemed to be extremely annoyed at having run up against

me so unexpectedly. At the first moment he did not recognize me, but suddenly his whole face changed. His first glance of malice and hatred suddenly became affable and good-humoured, and he held out both hands to me with extraordinary delight.

"Oh, it's you, is it! And I was just about to kneel down and send up a prayer for my deliverance. Did you hear me swearing?"

And he laughed in a good-natured way. But suddenly his face assumed an earnest and anxious expression.

"How could Alyosha let Natalya Nikolayevna live in such a place!" he said, shaking his head. "It's just these so-called trifles that show a man for what he is. He worries me. He is kind, he has a generous heart, but here is an example for you: he's frantically in love, yet he puts the girl he loves in a hole like this. I've heard that sometimes there wasn't even enough to eat in the house," he added in a whisper, feeling for the bell-handle. "My head splits when I think about his future and still more of the future of *Anna* Nikolayevna when she becomes his wife. . . ."

He used the wrong name, and did not notice it in his evident vexation at not finding the bell-handle. But there was no bell.

I tugged at the door-handle and Mavra at once opened the door to us, and met us fussily. Through the open door to the kitchen which was divided off from the tiny hall by a wooden partition, it could be seen that certain preparations had been made: everything seemed somehow different from usual, cleaned and polished; there was a fire in the stove, and some new crockery on the table. It was evident that we were expected. Mavra hastened to help us off with our coats.

"Is Alyosha here?" I asked her.

"He has not been," she whispered mysteriously.

We went in to Natasha. There were no signs of any

special preparations in her room; everything was as usual. But then her room was always so neat and charming that there was no need to tidy it up. Natasha met us, standing at the door. I was struck by the wasted look in her face, and its extreme pallor, though there was a momentary flush of colour on her wan cheeks. Her eyes were feverish. Hastily she held out her hand to the prince without speaking, visibly confused and agitated. She did not even glance at me. I stood and waited in silence.

"Here I am!" said the prince with friendly gaiety. "I've only been back a few hours. You've never been out of my mind all these days" (he kissed her hand tenderly) "and how much, how much I have thought about you. There is so much I want to say to you, to tell you. Well, we shall talk to our hearts' content now! To begin with, my scatterbrained youngster who, I observe, is not here yet. . . ."

"Excuse me, prince," Natasha interrupted, blushing and embarrassed, "I have to say a word to Ivan Petrovich. Vanya, come along . . . two words. . . ."

She seized my hand and drew me behind the screen.

"Vanya," she said in a whisper, leading me to the furthest corner, "will you ever forgive me?"

"Come, Natasha, what is there to forgive?"

"No, no, Vanya, you have forgiven me too much, and too often, but there's an end to all patience. You will never cease loving me, I know, but you'll call me ungrateful, and I was ungrateful to you yesterday and the day before yesterday, selfish, cruel. . . ."

She suddenly burst into tears and pressed her face on my shoulder.

"Hush, Natasha," I hastened to reassure her. "I've been very ill all night, and I can hardly stand now, that's why I didn't come yesterday or today, and you've been thinking I was angry. Dearest, do you suppose I don't understand what's going on in your heart now?"

"Well, that's right then . . . then you've forgiven me as you always do," she said, smiling through her tears, and squeezing my hand till it hurt. "The rest later. I've so much to tell you, Vanya. But now come back to him."

"Let's hurry, Natasha, we left him so suddenly. . . ."

"You'll see, you'll see what's coming," she whispered to me hurriedly. "Now I understand it all. I see through it all. It's all *his* doing. A great deal will be decided this evening. Come along!"

I didn't understand, but there was no time to ask. Natasha reappeared before the prince with a serene expression on her face. He was still standing with his hat in his hand. She apologized to him gaily, took his hat from him, moved up a chair for him and we three sat down round her little table.

"As I was saying about my scatterbrained boy," the prince resumed, "I only saw him for a moment and that was in the street when he was getting into his carriage to drive to the Countess Zinaida Fyodorovna. He was in a terrible hurry, and would you believe it, wouldn't even step down to come to my room, after a four days' separation! And I believe it's my fault, Natalya Nikolayevna, that he's not here and that we've arrived before him; I seized the chance and gave him a message to the countess as I couldn't be there myself today. But he will be here directly."

"I suppose he promised you to come today?" asked Natasha, looking at the prince with an air of perfect artlessness.

"Good heavens, as though he wouldn't have come anyway! How can you ask!" he exclaimed, looking at her in wonder. "I understand you though, you are angry with him. Indeed, it does seem wrong of him to be the last to come. But I repeat, the fault is mine. Don't be angry with him. He's shallow, frivolous, I don't defend him, but

certain special circumstances demand that far from giving up the countess and some other connections at present, he should, on the contrary, call on them as often as possible. And as he never leaves your side now, I expect, and has forgotten everything else on earth, please do not be angry if I sometimes take him off for an hour or two, not more, to do things for me. I dare say he has not been to see Princess K. once since that evening, and I'm so sorry I couldn't question him yet!"

I glanced towards Natasha. She was listening to the prince with a slight, half-mocking smile. But he spoke so frankly, so naturally. It seemed impossible to suspect him of anything.

"And you really did not know that he has not been near me all these days?" asked Natasha in a quiet and even voice, as if she were talking of a matter she deemed most ordinary.

"What? not been here once? Upon my word, what are you saying!" said the prince, apparently in extreme astonishment.

"You were here late on Tuesday evening. Next morning he came in to see me for half an hour, and I've not seen him once since then."

"But that's incredible!" (He was more and more astonished.) "I was quite certain he never left you now. Forgive me, but this is so strange . . . it's simply beyond belief."

"But it's true, though, and what a pity: I was looking forward to seeing you, hoping to learn from you where he has been."

"Oh, good Lord! But he'll be here directly. However, what you tell me is such a surprise to me that . . . I confess I was prepared for anything from him, but this, this!"

"How it surprises you! While I thought that, far from being surprised, you knew beforehand that it would be so."

"Knew? I? But I assure you, Natalya Nikolayevna, that I only saw him for one moment today, and I've questioned no one about him. And it strikes me as odd that you don't seem to believe me," he went on, scanning us both.

"God forbid!" Natasha exclaimed. "I'm quite convinced that you are telling the truth."

And she laughed again, right in the prince's face, so that he winced.

"Explain yourself!" he said in confusion.

"Why, there's nothing to explain. It's all very simple. You know how heedless and forgetful he is. And now that he has been given complete liberty he is carried away."

"But to be carried away like that is impossible, there must be something behind it; and as soon as he comes in I'll make him explain it all. But what surprises me most of all is that you seem to think me somehow to blame, too, when I was not even here. But I see, Natalya Nikolayevna, that you are very angry with him—and I can quite understand. You've every right to be so, and of course I'm the first person to blame if only because I'm the first to turn up; isn't that right?" he went on, turning to me, with a resentful jeer.

Natasha flushed red.

"Certainly, Natalya Nikolayevna," he continued with dignity, "I'll admit I am to blame, but only for going away the day after I made your acquaintance; so with a certain suspiciousness of character I observe in you, you have already changed your opinion of me—especially since circumstances have given some grounds for this. Had I not gone away, you would have come to know me better, and Alyosha would not have been so heedless with me to look after him. You shall hear for yourself what I'll have to say to him this evening."

"That is, you'll make him begin to feel me a burden."

It's not possible that a man as clever as you are should really think that that would be any help to me."

"Do you mean to hint, perhaps, that I would intentionally try to make him feel you a burden? I am deeply wounded, Natalya Nikolayevna."

"I try to employ as few hints as I can, whoever I am speaking to," answered Natasha. "I always try, on the contrary, to be as outspoken as I can, and you will perhaps be convinced of that this very evening. I don't wish to wound you, there would be no sense in it anyway; if only because you would not feel wounded by my words, whatever I might say to you. Of that I am certain, for I quite realize the relation in which we stand to one another; you can't take it seriously, can you? But if I really have offended you, I am ready to ask your pardon so that I may not be lacking in any of the obligations of . . . hospitality."

In spite of the light and even jesting tone with which she uttered these words, with laughter on her lips, I had never seen Natasha so intensely worked up. It was only now that I realized what her heartache must have been during those three days. Her enigmatic saying that she knew everything now and that she guessed it all, frightened me; it referred directly to the prince. She had changed her opinion of him and looked upon him as her enemy; that was evident. She apparently attributed her troubles with Alyosha to his influence and had perhaps some grounds for this belief. I was afraid there might be a scene between them at any moment. Her mocking tone was too manifest, too unconcealed. Her last words to the prince that he could not take their relations seriously, the phrase about the obligations of hospitality, her promise, that sounded more like a threat, to show him that very evening that she could be outspoken—all this was so caustic and undisguised that it was not possible that the prince should not understand it all. I saw his face change,

but he was well able to control himself. He at once pretended not to have noticed these words, not to have seen their significance, and of course took refuge in jocularity.

"God forbid I should demand apologies!" he cried, laughing. "That's not at all what I wanted, and indeed it's against my rules to ask apologies from a woman. At our first interview I warned you what I was like, so I hope you won't be angry with me for an observation I'm going to make, especially as it applies to all women. You will probably agree with this observation, too," he went on, politely turning to me. "Here we are: I've noticed there's a trait in the female character that if a woman is in fault in any way, she will sooner agree to smoothe over her offence with a thousand caresses later on, eventually, than admit her fault and ask forgiveness at the moment when she is confronted with it. And so, even supposing that you have offended me, I do not want your apologies now, at the present moment, I shall profit by waiting until you finally realize your mistake and want to make it up to me . . . with a thousand caresses. And you are so kind, so pure, so fresh, so open, that the moment of your penitence will, I foresee, be enchanting. Instead of apologizing, I wish you would tell me now whether I cannot do something this very evening to prove to you that I am acting much more sincerely and straightforwardly than you suppose."

Natasha reddened. I, too, thought that the tone of the prince's answer sounded somewhat too flippant, even casual, with a rather unseemly jocosity.

"You want to prove that you are simple and straightforward with me?" asked Natasha, looking at him with a challenging air.

"Yes."

"If so, do me a favour."

"I promise beforehand."

"And that is, not by one word, one hint, to worry Alyosha about me, neither today nor tomorrow. No reproof for having forgotten me; no remonstrance. I want to meet him as though nothing had happened, so that he may not even notice anything. That's what I want. Will you make me such a promise?"

"With the greatest of pleasure," answered the prince, "and allow me to add with all my heart that I have rarely met a more sensible and clear-sighted attitude in such circumstances.... But there is Alyosha, I believe."

A sound was in fact heard in the passage. Natasha started and seemed to prepare herself for something. Prince Valkovsky sat with a serious face waiting to see what would happen. He was watching Natasha intently. The door opened and Alyosha flitted in.

CHAPTER II

He literally flitted in with a beaming face, gay and joyous. It was evident that he had spent those four days gaily and happily. One could see from his face that he had something he was longing to tell us.

"Here I am!" he cried out, addressing us all. "I, who ought to have been here before anyone. But I'll tell you everything directly, everything, everything! I hadn't time to say as much as two words to you this morning, Papa, and I had so much to say to you. It's only in his good moments he lets me address him like that," he interrupted himself, addressing me. "I assure you at other times he forbids it! And I'll tell you what he does. He begins to use my full name. But from this day I want him always to have good moments only, and I shall see that he does! And I've become an altogether different person in these last four days, utterly, utterly different, and I'll

tell you all about it. But that will be presently. The great thing now is that she's here. Here she is! Again! Natasha, darling, how are you, my angel!" he said, sitting down beside her and fervently kissing her hands. "How I've been missing you all this time! But there it is! I couldn't help it! I wasn't able to manage it, my darling! You look a little thinner, you've grown so pale...."

He rapturously covered her hands with kisses, and looked eagerly at her with his beautiful eyes, as though he could never look enough. I glanced at Natasha, and from her face I guessed that our thoughts were the same: he was absolutely guiltless. And indeed when and how could this *guiltless* one become guilty? A bright flush suddenly overspread Natasha's pale cheeks, as though all the blood from her tormented heart had suddenly rushed to her head. Her eyes flashed and she looked proudly at the prince.

"But where . . . have you been so many days?" she said in a restrained and breaking voice. She was breathing in hard uneven gasps. My God, how she loved him!

"That's the whole point, it seems I really am in fault; oh, well, why *seems*, indeed! Of course I am in fault, and I know it myself, and I've come, knowing it. Katya has been telling me yesterday and today that no woman could forgive such negligence (she knows everything that's happened here on Tuesday; I told her the next day); I argued with her, I maintained that there was such a woman and her name was *Natasha*, and that perhaps there was only one other woman equal to her in the world and that was Katya; and I came here of course knowing I'd won the day. Could an angel like you refuse to forgive? 'If he hasn't come, it's because something has kept him. It's not because he doesn't love me!'—that's what my Natasha will think! And how could I cease loving you! Is it possible? My heart has been yearning for you so terribly. I'm in fault all the same. But when you know

all about it you'll be the first to stand up for me. I'll tell you all about it directly; I want to pour my heart out to you all; that's what I've come for. I wanted to drop in today (I was free for half a minute) to give you a flying kiss, but I didn't manage it. Katya sent for me on urgent and most important business. That was before you saw me in the carriage, Papa. That was the second time I was driving to Katya after a second note. You know messengers keep running all day long with notes between the two houses nowadays. Ivan Petrovich, I only read your note late last night and you are quite right in all you say in it. But what could I do? It was a physical impossibility! And so I thought 'tomorrow evening I'll set it all straight,' for it was impossible for me not to come to you this evening, Natasha."

"What note was that?" asked Natasha.

"He's been to my rooms and didn't find me, of course, so he pitched into me roundly in the letter he left for me for not having been to see you. And he's quite right. It was yesterday."

Natasha glanced at me.

"But if you had the time to be with Katerina Fyodorovna from morning till night . . ." Prince Valkovsky began.

"I know, I know what you're going to say," Alyosha interrupted. "If I could be at Katya's I ought to have had twice as much reason to be here. I quite agree with you and will even add: not twice as much reason but a million times as much. But, to begin with, there are strange unexpected events in life, you know, which upset everything and turn it topsy-turvy, and it's just things of that sort that have been happening to me. I'm telling you that I've become an utterly different person during the last days, different to my finger-tips. So they must have been important events!"

"Oh, dear me, but what has been happening to you? Don't keep us in suspense, please!" cried Natasha, smiling at Alyosha's enthusiasm.

He really was rather absurd; he talked very fast, his words rushed out pell-mell in a quick, continual patter. He was longing to tell us everything, to speak, to talk. But as he talked he still held Natasha's hand and continually raised it to his lips as though he could never kiss it enough.

"That's the whole point—what has been happening to me," Alyosha went on. "Ah, my friends; the things I've been seeing and doing, the people I've got to know! To begin with—Katya! She is perfection itself! I didn't know her a bit, not a bit till now. Even the other day, that Tuesday when I talked about her, do you remember, Natasha, with such enthusiasm, even then I hardly knew her at all. She had not been showing her real self to me then. But now we've got to know each other thoroughly. We call each other Katya and Alyosha. But I'll begin at the beginning. First of all, Natasha, if only you could hear all that she said to me about you the next day, Wednesday it was, when I told her all that had happened here. . . . And by the way, I remember what a stupid figure I cut when I came to see you on Wednesday! You greeted me with enthusiasm, you were full of our new position; you wanted to talk to me about it all; you were sad, and at the same time you were mischievous and playful with me; while I was putting on such a dignified air. Oh, fool, fool that I was! Would you believe it, I wanted to show off, to boast that I was soon to be a husband, a responsible person, and to think of my showing off to you! Oh, how you must have laughed at me and how I deserved your ridicule!"

The prince sat in silence, looking with a sort of triumphantly ironical smile at Alyosha. He seemed to be glad that his son was showing himself so flighty and even

absurd. I watched him carefully all that evening, and came to the definite conclusion that although there was much talk of his ardent fatherly love, he was not at all fond of his son.

"From here I went to Katya's," Alyosha rattled on. "I've told you already that it was only that morning we got to know each other thoroughly, and it's odd how it happened.... I don't remember it even ... some warm words, some feelings, thoughts frankly uttered and we were friends for ever. You've got to meet her, you really must, Natasha. How she unfolded, how she interpreted you to me. How she explained what a treasure you are to me. Little by little she revealed to me all her ideas, all her views on life; she's such a serious, such an enthusiastic girl! She talked of duty, of our mission in life, of how we all ought to serve humanity, and we were thoroughly agreed after a mere five or six hours' conversation, we ended by swearing eternal friendship, and that we would work together all our lives!"

"Work in what way?" asked his father in surprise.

"I'm so changed, Father, that all this must surprise you of course. I know all your objections beforehand," Alyosha responded solemnly. "You are all practical people, you have so many outdated principles, grave and severe. You look with mistrust, with hostility, with derision at everything new, everything young and fresh. But I'm no longer the same as you knew me a few days ago. I'm a different man! I look everything and everyone in the world boldly in the face. If I know that my conviction is right I will follow it to its utmost limit; and if I do not swerve from my path I'm an honest man. That's enough for me. You can say what you like after that. I believe in myself."

"Oh!" said the prince jeeringly.

Natasha looked round at us uneasily. She was afraid for Alyosha. It often happened that he showed to great

disadvantage when carried away in conversation, and she knew it. She did not want Alyosha to make himself ridiculous before us, and especially before his father.

"What are you saying, Alyosha? Why, it's some sort of philosophy," she said. "Someone's been teaching you, I suppose. . . . You'd much better tell us what you've been doing."

"But I am telling you!" cried Alyosha. "You see, Katya has two distant relations, cousins of some sort, called Lyovinka and Borinka. One's a student, the other's simply a young man. She's on friendly terms with them, and they're simply extraordinary men. They hardly ever go to the countess's, on principle. When Katya and I talked of the duty of man, of our mission in life and all that, she mentioned them to me, and gave me a note to them at once; I immediately rushed along to make their acquaintance. We became the closest of friends that very evening. There were about twelve people there: students, officers, artists; there was one writer. They all know you, Ivan Petrovich. That is, they've read your books and expect great things of you in the future. They told me so themselves. I told them I knew you and promised to introduce them to you. They all received me with open arms like a brother. I told them straight off that I should soon be a married man, and so they received me as a married man. They live on the fifth storey right under the roof. They meet as often as they can, but mostly on Wednesdays, at Lyovinka's and Borinka's. They're all fresh young people filled with ardent love for all humanity. We all talked of our present, of our future, of science and literature, and talked so well, so frankly and simply. . . . There's a high-school boy who comes too. You should see how they behave to one another, how noble-minded they are! I've never seen men like them before! Where have I been all this time? What have I seen? What ideas have I grown up in? You're the only one, Natasha,

who has ever told me anything of this sort. Ah, Natasha, you simply must get to know them; Katya knows them already. They speak of her almost with reverence, and Katya's already told Lyovinka and Borinka that when she comes into her property she'll subscribe a million to the common cause at once."

"And I suppose Lyovinka and Borinka and all their crowd will be the trustees for that million?" asked the prince.

"That's not true, that's not true! It's a shame to talk like that, Father!" Alyosha cried with heat. "I can guess what you're thinking! We certainly have talked about that million, and spent a long time discussing how to use it. We decided at last on public enlightenment before everything else. . . ."

"Yes, I really did not quite know Katerina Fyodorovna until now," the prince observed as it were to himself, still with the same mocking smile. "I was prepared for many things from her, it's true, but this. . . ."

"Why this?" Alyosha broke in. "Why do you think it so odd? Because it goes somewhat beyond your established routine? Because no one has subscribed a million before, and she will? Is that it? What of that, if she doesn't want to live at the expense of others, for living on those millions means living at the expense of others (I've only just found that out). She wants to be of service to her country and all, and to give her mite to the common cause. We used to read of that mite in our school-books, but when that mite smacks of a million it's quite a different matter! And what does it all rest on, all this notorious common sense that I believed in so? Why do you look at me like that, Father? As though you were looking at a buffoon, a fool! What does it matter if I am a fool? Natasha, you should have heard what Katya said about that. 'It's not the brains that matter most, but that which guides them—the character, the heart, generous

qualities, development.' But better still, Bezmigin has a saying about that that's a real gem. Bezmigin is a friend of Lyovinka's and Borinka's, and between ourselves he is a man of brains and real genius. Only yesterday he said in conversation, 'The fool who has admitted that he is a fool is no longer a fool.' How true! One hears utterances like that from him every minute. He positively scatters truths."

"That is truly a sign of genius," observed the prince.

"You're laughing at me again. But I've never heard anything like that from you, you know, and I've never heard anything like it from any of your friends either. On the contrary, in your circle they seem to be hiding all this, to be grovelling on the ground, so that all figures, all noses may follow certain measurements precisely, certain rules—as though that were possible! As though that were not a thousand times more impossible than what we talk about and what we think. And yet they call us Utopians! You should have heard what they said to me yesterday...."

"Well, but what is it you talk and think about? Tell us, Alyosha. I can't quite understand yet," said Natasha.

"Of everything in general that leads to progress, to humaneness, to love, it's all in relation to contemporary questions. We talk about the need of a free press, of the reforms that are coming in, of the love of humanity, of the public figures of today; we study and read them. But above all we've promised to be perfectly open with one another and to tell everything about ourselves, frankly, without embarrassment. Nothing but openness and straightforwardness can attain our object. That's what Bezmigin is striving most for. I told Katya about that and she is in complete sympathy with Bezmigin. And so all of us, under Bezmigin's leadership, have promised to act honestly and straightforwardly all our lives, and not to be disconcerted by anything, not to be ashamed of our enthusiasm, our fervour, our mistakes, and to go straight

forward whatever may be said of us and however we may be judged. If you want to be respected by others, the first and main thing is to respect yourself. Only by that, only by self-respect will you compel others to respect you too. That's what Bezmigin says and Katya agrees with him entirely. We're agreeing now upon our convictions in general, and have resolved to pursue the study of ourselves severally, and when we meet to explain one another to each other. . . ."

"What a string of nonsense!" cried the prince worriedly. "And who is this Bezmigin? No, it can't be left like this."

"What can't be left?" took up Alyosha. "Listen, Father, why am I saying all this now, before you? It's because I want and hope to bring you, too, into our circle. I've pledged myself in your name already. You laugh; well, I knew you'd laugh! But hear me out. You are kind and generous, you'll understand. You don't know, you've never seen these people, you haven't heard them speak. Granted you've heard of all this, and have studied it all; you are horribly learned; yet you haven't seen them, have not been in their house, and so how can you judge of them correctly? You only imagine that you know them. You be with them, listen to them, and then—then I warrant you'll be one of us. Above all I want to use every means I can to rescue you from ruin in the circle to which you have so attached yourself, and to save you from your convictions."

Prince Valkovsky listened to this sally in silence, with a caustic sneer; there was malice in his face. Natasha was watching him with unconcealed repulsion. He saw it, but pretended not to notice it. But as soon as Alyosha had finished, his father suddenly broke into a peal of laughter. He even fell back in his chair as though he could not control himself. But the laughter was definitely insincere. It was too evident that he was laughing simply to hurt and to humiliate his son as deeply as possible. And indeed Alyosha was mortified; his whole face betrayed intense

sadness. But he waited patiently until his father's merriment was over.

"Father," he began sadly, "why are you laughing at me?" I approached you frankly and openly. If, in your opinion, I am talking nonsense, correct me but don't laugh at me. And what do you find to laugh at? At that which is now sacred and noble for me? Why, suppose I am in error, suppose this is all wrong, mistaken, suppose I am a silly fool, as you've called me several times; but if I am making a mistake I'm sincere and honest in it; I've not lost my honour. I admire lofty ideas. They may be mistaken, but what they rest upon is sacred. I told you, you know, that you and all your friends have never yet said anything to me that could guide me, or captivate my imagination. Refute them, tell me something better than they have said, and I will follow you, but do not laugh at me, for it grieves me very much."

Alyosha pronounced these words with great sincerity, and a sort of severe dignity. Natasha watched him sympathetically. The prince listened to his son with amazement, and instantly changed his tone.

"I did not mean to grieve you at all, my boy," he answered. "On the contrary I sympathize with you. You are preparing to take such a step in life that it is only seemly for you to stop being such a feather-headed boy. That's what is in my mind. I could not help laughing, and had no wish to hurt your feelings."

"Then why did it seem so to me?" said Alyosha, with bitter feeling. "Why has it seemed to me for some time now that you are looking upon me with antagonism, with cold mockery, not the way a father looks at his son. Why is it I feel that if I were in your place I should not deride my son so offensively as you are doing. Listen, let us speak openly with one another now, once and for all, so that there may be no further misunderstanding. And ... I want to tell you the whole truth: when I walked in here

I had a feeling that there was something wrong here too; it was not like this somehow that I expected to find all of you together. Am I right? If so, wouldn't it be best for each of us to express his or her feelings frankly. How much evil may be averted by openness!"

"Speak, speak, Alyosha," said the prince. "What you propose is very wise. Perhaps we ought to have begun with that," he added, glancing at Natasha.

"Do not resent my perfect frankness then," began Alyosha. "You desire it and call for it yourself. Well then, you have agreed to my marriage with Natasha; you have granted us this happiness, and for the sake of it you have overcome your own feelings. You have been magnanimous, and we have all appreciated your noble gesture. Then why do you now, with a sort of glee, keep hinting to me that I'm still a ridiculous boy and am not fit to be a husband at all. What's more, you seem to want to humiliate me and make me ridiculous, and even contemptible, in Natasha's eyes. You are always delighted when you can make me look absurd. It is not now I've noticed it but a long time ago; as though you were trying for some reason to show us that our marriage is absurd and foolish, and that we are not fitted for one another. It's really as though you didn't believe yourself in what you are planning for us; as though you look upon it all as a joke, as an absurd fancy, as an amusing vaudeville. I am not deducing it from what you've said today alone. That very evening, that Tuesday when I came back to you from here, I heard some strange expressions from you which surprised and even hurt me. And on Wednesday, too, as you were going away, you made some allusions to our present position, and spoke of Natasha, not slightly, quite the contrary, but yet not as I would like to hear you speak, somehow too lightly, without affection, without the respect for her.... It's difficult to explain, but the tone was clear; I could hear it with my heart. Tell me then

that I'm mistaken. Reassure me, comfort me and . . . and her, too, for you've wounded her too. I guessed that from the first moment I came in."

Alyosha said this with spirit and resolution. Natasha listened to him with a certain solemnity, and, her face glowing with excitement, she said under her breath, once or twice during his speech: "Yes, yes. That's true." The prince was taken aback.

"My boy," he answered, "of course I can't remember everything I've said to you; but it's very strange you should have taken my words in that way. I'm quite ready to reassure you in every way I can. And if I laughed just now it was quite understandable too. I will tell you that with this laugh I wanted to cloak my bitter feelings. When I imagine that you are about to be a husband it seems to me now so utterly incredible, so absurd, so, excuse my saying so, ludicrous even. You are reproaching me for that laugh, but I tell you that it is all your doing. I am to blame, too: perhaps I haven't been with you sufficiently of late, and so it's only this evening that I have found out what you are capable of. Now I already dread the thought of your future with Natalya Nikolayevna: I have been too precipitate; I see that there is a great disparity between you. Love always passes, but incompatibility remains for ever. I'm not speaking of your own fate now, but if your intentions are honourable, do consider that you are bringing Natalya Nikolayevna to ruin together with yourself, you definitely are! Here you've been expounding for an hour on love of humanity, on the loftiness of your convictions, on the noble people you've made friends with; but ask Ivan Petrovich what I said to him just now as we climbed up that nasty staircase to the fourth storey, and were standing at the door, thanking God that our lives and limbs were safe. Do you know the thought that came into my mind in spite of myself? I was surprised that with a love like yours for Natalya Nikolayevna you

could bear to let her live in such a flat. How is it you haven't realized that if you have no means, if you are not in a position to do your duty, you have no right to be a husband, you have no right to undertake any responsibilities. Love alone is not enough; love shows itself in deeds, but your belief is 'live with me even if you have to suffer with me'—that's not humane, you know, not honourable! To talk of love for all humanity, to go into raptures over the problems of the universe, and at the same time to sin against love without noticing it—it's incomprehensible! Don't interrupt me, Natalya Nikolayevna, let me finish. I feel it too bitterly, I must speak out. You've been telling us, Alyosha, that during these last days you've been attracted by everything that's honourable, fine and noble, and you have reproached me that in our society there are no such attractions, nothing but cold common sense. Now look at this: to be attracted by everything lofty and fine, and after what had taken place here on Tuesday, to neglect for four whole days the one who, it would appear, must be more precious to you than anything on earth! You went so far as to admit that you argued with Katerina Fyodorovna that Natalya Nikolayevna is so generous and loves you so much that she will forgive you your behaviour. But what right have you to reckon on such forgiveness, and make bets about it? And is it possible you haven't once reflected what distress, what bitter thoughts, what doubts, what suspicions you've been inflicting on Natalya Nikolayevna all this time? Do you think that because you've been fascinated there by some new ideas, you had the right to ignore your primary duty? Forgive me, Natalya Nikolayevna, for breaking my word. But the present situation is more important than any promise, you will realize that yourself.... Do you know, Alyosha, that I found Natalya Nikolayevna in such agonies of distress that it was plain what a hell you had made of these four days for her, which should have been

the happiest in her life. Such conduct on one side and on the other—words, words, words . . . am I not right? And after this you can accuse me when you yourself have done so much wrong?”

Prince Valkovsky finished. He was quite carried away by his own eloquence and could not conceal his triumph from us. When Alyosha heard of Natasha's sufferings he looked at her with anguish, but Natasha had already come to a decision.

“Come, Alyosha, don't be unhappy,” she said. “Others are more to blame than you. Sit down and listen to what I have to say to your father. It's time to end all this!”

“Explain yourself, Natalya Nikolayevna!” cried the prince. “I beg you most earnestly! For the last two hours I have been listening to these riddles. It is becoming intolerable, and I must admit it was not a welcome like this that I expected here.”

“Perhaps; because you expected so to fascinate us with words that we should not notice your secret intentions. What is there to explain to you? You know it all and understand it all yourself. Alyosha is right. Your very first desire is to separate us. You knew beforehand, almost by heart, everything that would happen here, after last Tuesday, and you had it all worked out to a point. I have told you already that you are not taking me or the proposal you have made seriously. You are making fun of us, you are playing a game, and you are pursuing your own objects. Your game is a safe one. Alyosha was right when he reproached you for looking on all this as a vaudeville. You ought, on the contrary, to rejoice and not scold Alyosha, for without knowing anything about it he has done all that you expected of him, and perhaps even more.”

I was petrified with astonishment. I knew that some catastrophe would happen that evening. But I was utterly astounded at Natasha's ruthless plain speaking and her

frankly contemptuous tone. Then she really must know something, I thought, and has irrevocably determined upon a rupture. Perhaps she had even awaited the prince impatiently in order to tell him everything to his face. The prince paled a little. Alyosha's face betrayed naive alarm and agonizing expectation.

"Think what you have just accused me of," cried the prince, "and consider your words a little at least . . . I can make nothing of it all."

"Ah! So you don't care to understand at a word," said Natasha. "Even he, even Alyosha, understood you as I did, and we have not spoken about it, we have not even seen each other! He, too, fancied that you were playing an ignoble and insulting game with us, while he loves you and believes in you as though you were a deity. You haven't thought it necessary to be more cautious and hypocritical with him, you reckoned that he would not see through you. But he has a tender, sensitive, impressionable heart, and your words, your *tone*, as he says, have left a scar in his heart. . . ."

"I don't understand a word of it, not a word of it," repeated the prince, turning to me with an air of the utmost perplexity, as though he were calling me to witness. He was annoyed and excited.

"You are suspicious, you are alarmed," he went on, addressing Natasha. "You are simply jealous of Katerina Fyodorovna, and so you're ready to find fault with everyone in the world, and me especially . . . and, allow me to say it all: you show yourself in a very strange light . . . I am not accustomed to such scenes. I would not stay here another moment if it were not for my son's interests. I am still waiting, perhaps you will be pleased to explain?"

"So you still persist and will not understand at a word though you know all this by heart. Do you really want me to tell you everything plainly?"

"That is all I am anxious for."

"Very well then, listen," cried Natasha, her eyes flashing with anger. "I'll tell you everything, everything."

CHAPTER III

She got up and began to speak standing, unconscious of doing so in her excitement. After listening for a time, Prince Valkovsky stood up also. The whole scene was becoming too solemn.

"Remember your own words on Tuesday," Natasha began. "You said you wanted money, you sought the beaten road, importance in society—do you remember?"

"I remember."

"Well, it was to gain that money, to win all that success which was slipping out of your hands, that you came here on Tuesday and staged this betrothal, thinking that this practical joke would help you to capture what was eluding you."

"Natasha!" I cried. "Think what you're saying!"

"Practical joke!" repeated the prince with an air of grossly injured dignity.

Alyosha sat crushed with grief and gazed scarcely comprehending.

"Yes, yes, don't stop me. I have sworn to speak out," Natasha went on, irritated. "You will recall: Alyosha was not obeying you. You had worked on him for six whole months to draw him away from me. He held out against you. And suddenly the time came when you could not afford to lose a moment. If you let it pass, the chance, the money—above all the money, the three million of dowry would slip through your fingers. Only one course was left you, to make Alyosha fall in love with the girl you destined for him; you thought that if he fell in love with her he would perhaps give me up."

"Natasha! Natasha!" Alyosha cried in anguish, "what are you saying?"

"And you have acted accordingly," she went on, not heeding Alyosha's exclamation, "but—it was the same old story again! Everything might have gone well, but I was in the way again. There was only one thing to give you hope: a man of your cunning and experience must have noticed even then that Alyosha seemed at times weary of his old attachment. You could not fail to notice that he was beginning to neglect me, to be bored, to stay away for five days at a time. You thought he might get tired of me altogether and leave me, when suddenly on Tuesday Alyosha's resolute action came as a shock to you. What were you to do!"

"Allow me," cried the prince, "on the contrary, that fact...."

"I say," Natasha persisted, "you asked yourself that evening 'what am I to do now?' and decided to sanction his marrying me, not in reality but only in *words*, simply to placate him. The date of the wedding could be deferred, you thought, indefinitely, and meanwhile this new love was growing; you saw that. And on the growth of this new love you rested all your hopes."

"Romancing, romancing," the prince pronounced in an undertone, as though speaking to himself, "solitude, brooding, and novel-reading."

"Yes, on this new love you rested everything," Natasha repeated, neither hearing nor noticing his words, more and more carried away in a fever of excitement. "And the chances in favour of this new love! It had begun even before he knew all the girl's perfections. At the very moment when he disclosed to her that evening that he could not love her, that duty and another love forbade it—the girl suddenly displayed such nobility of character, such sympathy for him and for her rival, such spontaneous forgiveness, that though he had believed in

the beauty of her nature, he had not realized till that moment how wonderful she was. When he came to me he talked of nothing but her, she had impressed him so greatly. Yes, he was bound next day to feel an irresistible impulse to see this wonderful being again, if only from gratitude. And, indeed, why shouldn't he go to her? That old love of his was not suffering any longer, her future was secured, his whole life was to be given up to her, while the other would have only a minute. And how ungrateful that Natasha of his would be if she were jealous even of that little minute. And so without noticing it he robs this Natasha not of a minute, but of a day, two days, three. . . . And meantime, in those three days, the girl shows herself to him in a new and quite unexpected light, she is so noble, so enthusiastic, and at the same time such a naive child, in fact, so like himself in this. They vow eternal friendship and brotherhood, they wish never to be parted. *After a mere five or six hours' conversation* his soul is opened to new sensations and his whole heart is won. The time will come at last, you are thinking, when he will compare his old feeling with his new, fresh sensations. There everything is familiar, and the same as usual; there it's all serious and exacting; there he finds jealousy and reproaches; there he finds tears. . . . Or if there is lightness and playfulness, he is treated like a child, not an equal . . . but the main thing is: it's all so familiar, so customary. . . ."

Tears and a spasm of bitterness choked her, but Natasha controlled herself for a minute longer.

"And then what? Why, time. The wedding date with Natasha has not been fixed yet; there's plenty of time and all will change yet. And then you are always there with your words, hints, arguments, eloquence. . . . You may even be able to trump up something against that troublesome Natasha; she can be shown in an unfavourable light and . . . there's no telling how it will be done, but the

victory is yours! Alyosha! Don't blame me, my dear! Do not say that I don't understand your love and don't appreciate it. I know you love me even now, and that perhaps at this moment you don't understand my complaints. I know I've done very, very wrong to say all this now. But what am I to do, since I understand all this, and love you more and more . . . simply . . . madly!"

She hid her face in her hands, fell into her chair, and sobbed like a child. Alyosha cried out and rushed to her. He could never see her cry without tears.

Her sobs were, apparently, of great service to the prince; Natasha's vehemence during this long explanation, the violence of her attack on him which he was bound to resent, if only from decorum, all this might be ascribed now to an outburst of insane jealousy, to wounded love, even to illness. It was even appropriate to show sympathy.

"Calm yourself, don't distress yourself, Natalya Nikolayevna," the prince consoled her. "All this is frenzy, dreamings, the fruits of solitude. You have been so exasperated by his thoughtless behaviour. But it is only thoughtlessness on his part, you know. The most important fact on which you lay so much stress, the happenings of last Tuesday, ought rather to prove to you the depth of his love for you, whereas you have been imagining. . . ."

"Oh, don't speak to me, don't torture me now at least!" Natasha interrupted him, weeping bitterly. "My heart has told me everything, has told me long ago! Can you really think I do not understand that the love he used to have for me is over. . . . Here, in this room, alone . . . when he left me, forgot me . . . I have been through everything, thought over everything What else was there for me to do? I'm not blaming you, Alyosha. Why deceive me? Can you really suppose I haven't tried to deceive myself? Oh, how often, how often! Haven't I listened to every tone of his voice? Haven't I learnt to read his face, his

eyes? It's all, all over. It's all buried. Oh! how wretched I am!"

Alyosha was crying on his knees before her.

"Yes, yes, it's my fault! It's all my doing!" he repeated through his sobs.

"No, don't blame yourself, Alyosha ... there are others ... our enemies. ... It's their doing ... theirs!"

"But after all, I must say," the prince began at last with some impatience, "what grounds have you for ascribing to me all these ... crimes? It's nothing but conjectures on your part. There's no proof of them."

"No proof!" cried Natasha, rising swiftly from her armchair. "You want proof, you treacherous man! You could not have had any other motive, you could not, when you came here with your proposal! You had to placate your son, to appease his conscience that he might give himself up to Katya with a freer and easier mind. Without that he would always be remembering me, he would have held out against you, and you have got tired of waiting. Why, isn't that true?"

"I confess," said the prince, with a sarcastic smile, "if I had wanted to deceive you that would certainly have been my calculation. You are very ... quick-witted, but you ought to have proofs before you insult people with such reproaches."

"Proofs! And all your attitude in the past when you were trying to get him away from me! The man who teaches his son to disregard such obligations, and to play with them for the sake of worldly advantage, for the sake of money, is corrupting him! What was it you said just now about the staircase and the poorness of my lodging? Wasn't it you who stopped the allowance you used to give him to force us apart through poverty and hunger? This lodging and the staircase are your fault, and now you reproach him with it—you double-faced man! And what was it roused in you that night such fervour, gave you

such new and uncharacteristic convictions? And why was I so necessary to you? I've been walking up and down this room these four days; I've thought over everything, I have weighed every word you uttered, every expression of your face, and I'm certain that it has all been a pretence, a sham, a mean, insulting and unworthy farce.... I know you, I've known you for a long time. Whenever Alyosha came here after seeing you I could divine from his face all that you had been saying to him, all that you had been impressing on him; I learnt how your influence affected him. No, you can't deceive me! Perhaps you have some other calculations; perhaps I haven't said the main thing now; but never mind! You have been deceiving me—that's what matters most. That is what I had to tell you straight to your face!"

"Is that all? Is that all the proof you have? But think, you frantic woman: by that farce (as you call my proposal on Tuesday) I bound myself too much. It would have been too irresponsible of me...."

"How, how did you bind yourself? What does it matter for you to deceive me? And what does it matter if a girl in my position is insulted? Why, she's a wretched runaway, cast off by her own father, defenceless, she has *disgraced* herself, she's *immoral*! Is there any need to be squeamish with her if this *joke* can be of some use, even the very smallest!"

"But consider the position you are putting yourself into, Natalya Nikolayevna! You will insist that you have been insulted by me. But this is an insult so great, so humiliating, that I can't understand how can you even imagine it, much less insist on it. What must you be accustomed to, to be able to suppose this so readily, forgive my saying so. I have the right to reproach you, because you are setting my son against me: If he has not risen against me now on your account, his heart is set against me."

"No, Father, no!" cried Alyosha, "if I haven't risen against you it's because I believe you could not be guilty of such an insult, and I cannot believe that it is possible to inflict an insult such as this!"

"Do you hear?" cried the prince.

"Natasha, it's all my fault, don't blame him. It's sinful and horrible."

"Do you hear, Vanya? He is already against me!" cried Natasha.

"Enough!" said the prince. "We must put an end to this painful scene. This blind and savage outburst of unbridled jealousy shows me your character in quite a novel light. I am forewarned. We were precipitate, we really were. You have not even noticed how you have insulted me; it's nothing to you. Yes, precipitate . . . precipitate . . . my word ought to be sacred of course, but . . . I am a father, and I wish my son happiness. . . ."

"You are going back on your word!" cried Natasha, beside herself. "You are glad of the opportunity. But let me tell you that here, alone, I made up my mind two days ago to give him back his promise, and now I repeat it before everyone. I refuse his hand!"

"That is, perhaps, you want to reawaken in him all his old anxieties again, his feeling of duty, all his worrying about his obligations (as you expressed it just now yourself), so as to bind him to you again. This is supported by your own theory; that is why I'm saying it; but enough, time will decide. I will await a calmer moment for an explanation with you. I hope we are not breaking off our relations entirely. I hope, too, that you may learn to appreciate me better. Only today I meant to tell you of my plans regarding your family, which would have shown you But enough! Ivan Petrovich," he added, coming up to me, "now, more than ever, I should appreciate closer acquaintance with you, to say nothing of it being my long

felt wish. I hope you understand me. I shall be calling on you in a day or two if you will allow me."

I bowed. It seemed to me, too, that now I could no longer avoid making his acquaintance. He shook my hand, silently bowed to Natasha, and walked out with an air of injured dignity.

CHAPTER IV

For several minutes neither of us said a word. Natasha sat pensive, sorrowful and crushed. All her energy had suddenly left her. She looked straight before her seeing nothing, holding Alyosha's hand in hers and seeming lost in oblivion. He was quietly washing his grief away in tears, glancing up at her from time to time with timorous curiosity.

At last he began timidly trying to comfort her, besought her not to be angry, blamed himself; it was evident that he was very anxious to acquit his father, and that this burdened his mind particularly. He began on the subject several times, but did not dare to speak out, afraid of rousing Natasha's anger again. He protested his eternal unchanging love, and hotly justified his devotion to Katya, continually repeating that he only loved Katya as a sister, a dear, kind sister, whom he could not abandon altogether; that this would even be coarse and cruel on his part; that if Natasha knew Katya they would be friends at once, so much so that they would never part and there would never be any misunderstandings again. This idea appealed to him particularly. The poor fellow was perfectly truthful. He did not understand Natasha's apprehensions, and indeed had not really understood what she had just said to his father. All he understood was that they had quarrelled, and that above all lay like a stone on his heart.

"Are you blaming me on your father's account?" asked Natasha.

"How can I blame you," he said with bitter feeling, "when I'm the cause of everything, and it's all my fault? It's I who have driven you to such anger, and in your anger you blamed him, because you wanted to defend me. You always stand up for me, and I don't deserve it. You had to fix the blame on someone, so you suspected him. But truly, truly he's not to blame!" cried Alyosha, warming up. "And was it with that thought he came here? Was that what he expected?"

But seeing that Natasha was looking at him with distress and reproach, he was abashed at once.

"Forgive me, I won't say any more, I won't," he said. "It's all my fault!"

"Yes, Alyosha," she went on mournfully. "Now he has come between us and spoilt all our peace, for the rest of our lives. You always believed in me more than in anyone; now he has poured distrust and suspicion of me into your heart; you blame me; he has taken half your heart away from me. A black cat has run between us."

"Don't speak like that, Natasha. Why do you talk of a 'black cat'?" He was hurt by the expression.

"He has won you over by his false kindness, his faked generosity," Natasha continued. "And now he will set you more and more against me."

"I swear that it isn't so," exclaimed Alyosha with still greater heat. "He was irritated when he said we were 'too precipitate.' You'll see tomorrow, in a day or two, he'll think better of it; and if he's so angry that he really won't agree to our marriage I swear I won't obey him. I shall have sufficient strength, perhaps, for that. And do you know who will help us?" he cried, delighted with his idea. "Katya will help us! And you will see, you will see what a wonderful creature she is! You will see whether she wants to be your rival and part us! And how unfair you were just now when you said that I was one of those who might change the day after marriage! It hurt me so

to hear you say that! No, I'm not like that, and if I went often to see Katya. . . ."

"Oh, Alyosha, go and see her whenever you like. That wasn't what I meant just now. You didn't understand it all. Be happy with anyone you like. After all, I can't ask more of your heart than it can give me. . . ."

Mavra came in.

"Shall I bring in the tea or what? It's no joke keeping the samovar boiling for two hours. It's eleven o'clock."

She spoke rudely and crossly. She was evidently out of humour and angry with Natasha. The fact was that ever since Tuesday she had been so elated that her young lady (whom she was very fond of) was to be married, that she had already proclaimed it all over the house and neighbourhood, in the shop, and to the porter. She had been boasting of it and relating triumphantly that a prince, a man of consequence, and a general, awfully rich, had come himself to beg her young lady's consent, and she, Mavra, had heard it with her own ears, and now, suddenly, it had all ended in smoke. The prince had gone away furious, and no tea had been offered to him, and of course it was all her young lady's fault, Mavra had heard her speaking disrespectfully to him.

"Oh . . . all right," answered Natasha.

"And the supper, do I serve it or not?"

"Yes, the supper too."

Natasha was confused.

"Cooking and baking, cooking and baking," Mavra went on. "I've been run off my feet ever since yesterday. I ran to the Nevsky for the wine, and now. . . ." And she went out, slamming the door angrily.

Natasha reddened and looked at me rather strangely.

Meanwhile tea was served, and the supper too. There was game, fish of some sort, two bottles of excellent wine from Yeliseyev. What had all these preparations been for, I wondered.

"You see what I am like, Vanya," said Natasha, going up to the table, and she was even ashamed to face me. "I foresaw it would all end as it has ended, you know; and still I thought that perhaps it wouldn't end so. I thought Alyosha might come, and begin to make peace and we should be reconciled. All my suspicions would turn out to be unjust, I should be reassured . . . and I got the supper ready on the chance. I thought perhaps we should sit and talk till late."

Poor Natasha! She blushed so deeply as she said this. Alyosha grew rapturous.

"There, you see, Natasha!" he cried. "You didn't believe it yourself; two hours ago you didn't believe in your suspicions yourself. Yes, it must all be set right. I'm to blame. It's all my fault and I'll make it right, Natasha, let me go straight to my father. I must see him; he is hurt, he is offended; I must comfort him. I will tell him everything, speaking only for myself, only for myself! You shan't be mixed up in it. And I'll settle everything. Don't be angry with me for being so anxious to go to him and ready to leave you. It's not that at all. I am sorry for him; he will justify himself to you, you will see. Tomorrow I'll be with you as soon as it's light, and I'll spend the whole day with you. I won't go to Katya's."

Natasha did not detain him; she even urged him to go. She was dreadfully afraid that Alyosha would now force himself to stay with her from morning till night, and would weary of her. She only begged him to say nothing in her name, and tried to smile at him as gaily as she could at parting. He was about to leave when, suddenly he went up to her, took her by both hands, and sat down beside her. He looked at her with indescribable tenderness.

"Natasha, my darling, my angel, don't be angry with me, and don't let us ever quarrel. And give me your word that you'll always have faith in me, and I will have faith

in you. There, my angel, I'll tell you now: We quarrelled once, I don't remember what about; it was my fault. We wouldn't speak to one another. I didn't want to be the first to beg pardon but I was awfully miserable. I wandered all over the town, lounged about everywhere, went to see my friends, but my heart was so heavy, so heavy. . . . And then the thought came into my mind, what if you fell ill, for instance, and died? And when I pictured it, I suddenly felt such despair as though I had really lost you for ever. My thoughts grew more and more oppressive and terrible. And little by little I began to imagine that I had come to your grave, had fallen upon it in despair, embraced it, and lay prostrate with anguish. I imagined how I would have kissed that grave, and called you out of it, if only for a moment, and prayed God for a miracle that for one moment you might rise up before me; I imagined how I would have rushed to embrace you, press you to me, kiss you, and die, it seemed, with bliss at being able once more for one instant to hold you in my arms as before. And as I was imagining this, I suddenly thought: here I would be praying to God for one minute of you, while here you have been with me six months, and during those six months how many times we've quarrelled, how many days we wouldn't speak to one another. For whole days we've been on bad terms, unappreciative of our happiness, and here I'm calling you from the grave for one minute and for that minute I'm ready to give my whole life. . . . When I pictured all that I couldn't bear it any longer, but rushed to you as fast as I could, and you were expecting me, and when we made up and embraced I remember I held you in my arms so tightly as though I were really losing you, Natasha. Don't let us ever quarrel! It always grieves me so. And, good heavens, could I possibly leave you ever!"

Natasha was crying. They embraced each other warmly, and Alyosha swore once more that he would never leave her. Then he flew off to his father. He was firmly convinced

that he would settle everything, that he would make everything come right.

"It's the end! It's the end!" said Natasha, pressing my hand convulsively. "He loves me and he will never cease to love me. But he loves Katya, too, and in a little time he'll love her more than me. And that viper, the prince, will keep his eyes open, and then...."

"Natasha! I, too, believe that the prince is playing foul, but...."

"You don't believe everything I've said to him! I saw it in your face. But wait a little, you'll see for yourself whether I'm right or wrong. I was only speaking generally, you know, but heaven knows what else he has in his mind! He's a horrible man. I've been walking up and down this room for the last four days, and I understood it all. What he wanted was to set Alyosha free, to relieve his heart from the burden of sadness that's interfering with his life, from the duty of loving me. He thought up this betrothal with the idea, too, of worming his way in between us with his influence, and of captivating Alyosha by his generosity and magnanimity. It's true, it's really true, Vanya! Alyosha's just that sort of man. His mind would be set at rest about me, his uneasiness on my account would be over. He would think: 'why, she's my wife now, and mine for life,' and would unconsciously pay more attention to Katya. The prince has evidently studied this Katya well, and realized that she is suited to him, that her fascination for him could be stronger than mine. Oh, Vanya, you are my only hope now! He wants to make friends with you for some reason, to get to know you. Don't oppose this, and for goodness' sake, dear, try to be presented to the countess soon; make friends with this Katya, study her thoroughly and tell me what she is like. I must have my own eye there. No one understands me as you do, and you will know what I want. Try and see, too, how far their friendship has

gone, how much there is between them, what they talk about. It's Katya, Katya, you must observe chiefly. Show me once more, dear, darling Vanya, show me once more what a true friend you are to me! You are my hope, my only hope now."

.
It was after midnight when I got home. Nellie opened the door to me with a sleepy face. She smiled and looked at me sweetly. The poor child was very much vexed with herself for having fallen asleep. She had wanted to sit up for me. She told me someone had been and inquired for me, had sat and waited for a time, and had left a note on the table for me. The note was from Maslobojev. He invited me to his house the next day between twelve and one. I wanted to question Nellie, but I put it off till next morning, insisting that she should go to bed at once. The poor child was tired as it was waiting up for me, and had only fallen asleep half an hour before I came in.

CHAPTER V

In the morning Nellie told me some rather strange details about the visit of the previous evening. Indeed, the very fact that Maslobojev had taken it into his head to come that evening was strange in itself. He knew for a certainty that I should not be at home. I remember distinctly warning him of it at our last meeting. Nellie told me that at first she had been unwilling to open the door, because she was afraid—it was already eight o'clock. But he persuaded her to do so through the door, assuring her that if he did not leave a note for me then, it would be very bad for me next day. When she let him in he wrote the note at once, went up to her, and sat down beside her on the sofa.

"I got up, and didn't want to talk to him," said Nellie. "I was very much afraid of him; he began to talk of

Bubnova, telling me how angry she was, that now she wouldn't dare to take me, and began praising you; said that he was a great friend of yours and had known you as a little boy. After that I began to talk to him. He brought out some sweets, and asked me to take them. I didn't want to; then he began to assure me he was a good man, and that he could sing and dance. He jumped up and began dancing. It made me laugh. Then he said he'd stay a little longer—"I'll wait for Vanya, maybe he'll come in"; and begged me earnestly not to be afraid of him, but to sit down beside him. I did, but wouldn't say anything to him. Then he told me he used to know Mamma and Grandfather and ... then I began to talk. And he stayed a long time...."

"But what did you talk about?"

"About Mamma ... about Bubnova ... Grandfather. He stayed two hours or so."

Nellie seemed unwilling to say what they had talked about. I did not question her, hoping to hear it all from Masloboyev. It occurred to me, however, that Masloboyev had purposely come when I was out in order to find Nellie alone. "What did he do that for?" I wondered.

She showed me the three sweets he had given her. They were fruit-drops done up in green and red paper, very bad ones, probably bought at a greengrocer's shop. Nellie laughed as she showed them to me.

"Why didn't you eat them?" I asked.

"I didn't want to," she answered seriously, knitting her brows. "I didn't take them from him; he left them on the sofa himself...."

I had to run about a great deal that day. I told Nellie I would have to leave her.

"Are you lonesome by yourself?" I asked her as I was leaving.

"Yes and no. I am lonesome when you aren't here for a long while."

And she looked at me so fondly as she said this. All that morning she had been looking at me with the same fond glance and she seemed so gay, so affectionate, and at the same time there was something shamefaced, even timid in her manner, as though she were afraid of vexing me in some way, and losing my affection and . . . and of showing her feelings too strongly, as though she were ashamed of them.

"And why aren't you lonesome then? You said 'yes and no,' didn't you?" I could not help asking, smiling to her—she was growing so dear and precious to me.

"I know why," she answered smiling and for some reason abashed again.

We were talking in the open doorway. Nellie was standing before me with her eyes cast down, with one hand on my arm, and with the other pinching my sleeve.

"What is it, a secret?" I asked.

"No . . . it's nothing . . . I've . . . I've begun reading your book while you were away," she brought out in a low voice, and turning a tender penetrating look upon me she flushed crimson.

"Ah, so that's it! Well, do you like it?"

I felt the embarrassment of an author praised to his face, but I don't know what I would have given to kiss her at that moment. But somehow it seemed impossible to kiss her. Nellie was silent for a moment.

"Why, why did he die?" she asked with an expression of the deepest sadness, stealing a glance at me and suddenly dropping her eyes again.

"Who?"

"Why, that young man in consumption . . . in the book."

"It couldn't be helped. It had to be so, Nellie."

"No, it hadn't, at all," she answered, hardly above a whisper, but suddenly, abruptly, almost angrily, pouting and staring still more obstinately at the floor.

Another minute passed.

"And she . . . they . . . the girl and the old man," she whispered, still plucking at my sleeve, but harder than before. "Will they live together? And they won't be poor?"

"No, Nellie, she'll go far away; she'll marry a country gentleman, and he'll be left alone," I answered with extreme regret, really sorry that I could not tell her something more comforting.

"You see . . . there! How horrid! Ugh! I don't want to read it now!"

And she pushed my arm away angrily, turned her back on me quickly, walked away to the table and stood with her face to the corner, and her eyes on the ground. She was flushed and breathed unevenly, as from some terrible disappointment.

"Come, Nellie, you're angry now," I said, going up to her. "You know, it's not true what's written in it, it's all made up; what is there to be angry about! You're such a sensitive little girl!"

"I'm not angry," she said timidly, looking up at me with clear and loving eyes; then she suddenly snatched my hand, pressed her face to my breast, and for some reason began crying.

But at the same moment she laughed—laughed and cried together. I, too, felt like laughing, and somehow it was moving too. But nothing would make her lift her head, and when I began pulling her face away from my shoulder she pressed it more and more closely against me, and laughed more and more.

At last this sentimental scene was over. We parted. I was in a hurry. Nellie, flushed, and still shamefaced as it were, with eyes that shone like stars, ran after me out on the stairs, and begged me to come back early. I promised to be back for dinner, and as early as possible.

I went to the Ikhmenevs first. They were both unwell. Anna Andreyevna was quite ill; Nikolai Sergeich was in his study. He heard me come in, but I knew that, as usual,

he would not appear for about a quarter of an hour, so as to give us time to talk our fill. I did not want to upset Anna Andreyevna too much, and so I softened my account of the previous evening as far as I could, but I told her the truth. To my surprise, though the old lady was disappointed, she was not astonished to hear of the possibility of a rupture.

"Well, my dear boy, it's just as I thought," she said. "When you'd gone I pondered over it, and knew that it was not to be. We've not deserved such a blessing from the Almighty; besides he's such a wicked man; could we expect anything good to come from him? It shows what he is that he's taking ten thousand rubles from us for nothing. He knows it's for nothing, but he takes it all the same. He's robbing us of our last crust of bread; they'll sell Ikhmenevka now. And Natasha's right and wise not to believe them. But do you know, my dear boy, what my man's at?" she went on, dropping her voice. "He's absolutely set against this marriage. He let it out. 'I won't have it,' said he. At first I thought it was only a folly of his; but no, he means it. What will happen to her then, poor darling. He'll curse her for ever. And how about Alyosha? What does he say?"

And she went on questioning me for a long time, and as usual she sighed and moaned over every answer I gave her. Of late I noticed that she had become quite unnerved somehow. Every piece of news upset her. Her grief over Natasha was destroying her health and her heart.

The old man appeared in his dressing-gown and slippers: he complained of a fever, but looked fondly at his wife, and all the time that I was there he fussed about her like a nurse, gazed into her eyes, and even seemed a little timid with her. There was so much tenderness in the way he looked at her. Her illness had frightened him; he felt he would be bereaved of everything on earth if he lost her.

I stayed with them for an hour. When I was taking my leave he came out into the passage with me and began speaking of Nellie. He seriously thought of taking her into his house to be a daughter to them. He asked my opinion how to predispose Anna Andreyevna in favour of the plan. He questioned me about Nellie with particular curiosity, asking whether I had found out anything fresh about her. I told him briefly. My story made an impression on him.

"We'll speak of it again," he said with determination. "And meanwhile . . . but I'll come to you myself, as soon as I'm a little better. Then we'll decide."

At twelve o'clock precisely I reached Masloboyev's. To my intense amazement the first person I met when I went in was Prince Valkovsky. He was putting on his overcoat in the hall, while Masloboyev helped him fussily and handed him his cane. He had already told me that he was acquainted with the prince, and yet this meeting astonished me extremely.

Prince Valkovsky seemed confused when he saw me. "Oh, it's you!" he cried with somewhat exaggerated warmth. "What a meeting, only fancy! But I have just heard from Mr. Masloboyev that you were acquainted. I'm glad, awfully glad to have met you; I was anxious to see you, and was hoping to call on you as soon as possible, if you will allow me. I have a favour to ask of you: help me, explain to me our present state of affairs. You understand, of course, that I am referring to what happened yesterday. . . . You are an intimate friend there; you have followed the whole course of the affair; you have influence. . . . I'm awfully sorry that I can't stay now. . . . Business, you know! But in a few days, and perhaps sooner, I shall have the pleasure of calling on you. But now. . . ."

His handshake was too hearty somehow. He exchanged a glance with Masloboyev, and went away.

"Tell me for mercy's sake . . ." I began, as I went into the room.

"I won't tell you anything," Maslobojev interrupted, hurriedly snatching up his cap and going towards the hall. "I've business. I must run, too, my boy. I'm late."

"Why, you wrote to me yourself to come at twelve o'clock."

"What if I did? I wrote to you yesterday, but today I've been written to myself, and so that my head's in a whirl—that's how it is! They're waiting for me. Forgive me, Vanya. The only thing I can suggest to you by way of satisfaction is to beat me up for having troubled you unnecessarily. If you want the satisfaction, go ahead; only, for Christ's sake, hurry up! Don't keep me. I've business, I'm late. . . ."

"But why should I want to beat you up? Make haste then if you've business; things unforeseen may happen to anyone. Only. . . ."

"Well, as for that *only*, I'll tell you," he interrupted, dashing out into the hall and putting on his coat (I followed his example). "I have business with you, too; very important business; that's why I asked you to come; it directly concerns you and your interests. And as it's impossible to tell you about it in one minute now, for goodness' sake promise me to come here today at seven o'clock, neither before nor after. I'll be at home."

"Today," I said uncertainly. "Well, old man, this evening I meant to go. . . ."

"Go at once, dear boy, where you meant to go this evening and this evening come here instead. For you can't imagine, Vanya, the things I have to tell you."

"All right, all right; but what could it be? I confess you make me curious."

Meanwhile we had come out of the gate and were standing on the pavement.

"So you'll come?" he asked insistently.

"I've told you I will."

"No, give me your word of honour."

"Goodness, what a fellow! Very well, my word of honour."

"That's decent and noble of you. Which way are you going?"

"This way," I answered, pointing to the right.

"Well and I'm going that way," said he pointing to the left. "Good-bye, Vanya. Remember, seven o'clock."

"Odd," thought I, looking after him.

I had meant to be at Natasha's that evening. But as now I had given my word to Masloboyev, I decided to call on Natasha at once. I felt sure I should find Alyosha there. And, in fact, he was there and was awfully glad when I came in.

He was very charming, extremely tender with Natasha, and upon my arrival became quite gay. Natasha on her part tried to appear cheerful too, but it was obviously an effort. Her face looked pale and ill; she had slept badly. She was more tender than ever to Alyosha.

Though Alyosha talked a great deal and told her all sorts of things, evidently trying to cheer her up and to bring a smile to her lips which would involuntarily relapse into unsmiling gravity, he obviously avoided speaking of Katya or of his father. Apparently his efforts at reconciliation had not succeeded.

"Do you know what? He wants dreadfully to get away from me," Natasha whispered to me hurriedly when he went out for a minute to give some order to Mavra. "But he's afraid. And I'm afraid to tell him to go, for then perhaps he'll stay on purpose; but what I'm afraid of most is that he'll be bored with me, and this will make him altogether cold to me! What shall I do?"

"Good Lord, what a position you're putting yourselves into! And how suspicious, how watchful you are of one

another. Just have it out and be done with it. Why, this very position might really bore him.

"What's to be done?" she cried, frightened.

"Wait a minute. I'll arrange it all for you."

And I went into the kitchen on the pretext of asking Mavra to clean one of my galoshes which was covered with mud.

"Be careful, Vanya," she cried after me.

As soon as I went out to Mavra, Alyosha rushed up to me as though he had been waiting for me.

"Ivan Petrovich, my dear friend, what am I to do? Do advise me! I promised yesterday to be at Katya's just at this time today. I can't shirk it, can I? I love Natasha beyond expression; I would go through fire for her, but you'll admit that I can't throw up everything over there...."

"Well, go then."

"But what about Natasha? I shall grieve her, you know. Ivan Petrovich, do get me out of it somehow."

"I think you'd much better go. You know how she loves you: she will be thinking all the while that you are bored with her and are merely forcing yourself to stay. It's better to be less constrained. Come along, though. I'll help you."

"Dear Ivan Petrovich, how kind you are!"

We went back; a minute later I said to him:

"I saw your father just now."

"Where?" he cried, alarmed.

"In the street, by chance. He stopped to speak to me a minute, and asked again if he could call on me. He was asking about you, whether I knew where you were now. He was very anxious to see you, to tell you something."

"Now, Alyosha, you'd better go and show yourself," Natasha put in, understanding what I was leading up to.

"But where shall I find him now? Will he be at home?"

"No, I think he said he'd be at the countess's."

"What shall I do then?" Alyosha asked naively, looking sadly at Natasha.

"Why, Alyosha, what's wrong?" she said. "Do you really mean to give up that acquaintance to set my mind at rest? Why, that's childish. To begin with, it's impossible, and secondly, it would be ungrateful to Katya. You are friends—how can such ties be broken so rudely. And, finally, you are offending me if you think I'm so jealous. Go at once, go, I beg you! Your father will be pleased, too."

"Natasha, you're an angel, and I'm not worth your little finger!" cried Alyosha rapturously and remorsefully. "You are so kind while I . . . I . . . well, let me tell you, I've just been asking Ivan Petrovich out there in the kitchen to help me to get away. And this was his idea. But don't be hard on me, Natasha, my angel! I'm not so much in fault, for I love you a thousand times more than anything on earth, and so I've made a new plan—to tell Katya everything and describe to her our present position and all that happened here yesterday. She'll think of something to save us; she's devoted to us, heart and soul."

"Well, go along then," said Natasha, smiling. "And, my dear, d'you know, I am very eager to make Katya's acquaintance myself. How could it be arranged?"

Alyosha's enthusiasm was beyond all bounds. He at once began devising ways for bringing about a meeting. To his mind it was very simple; Katya would think of something. He enlarged on his idea, warmly, excitedly. He promised to bring an answer that day, within a couple of hours, and to spend the evening with Natasha.

"Will you really come?" asked Natasha at parting.

"Can you doubt it? Good-bye, Natasha, good-bye, my beloved—beloved of mine for ever. Good-bye, Vanya. Oh, heavens, I called you Vanya unwittingly. I say, Ivan Petrovich, I am so fond of you—let me call you, Vanya. Let's drop formality."

"Yes, let us."

"Thank goodness! It's been in my mind a hundred times, but I've never dared to speak of it somehow. Ivan Petrovich—there I've done it again. You know, it's so difficult to say Vanya all at once. I think that's been described somewhere by Tolstoi: two people promise to call each other by their Christian names, but they simply can't do it and keep avoiding using any name at all. Ah, Natasha, do let's read *Childhood and Boyhood* over together; it's such a fine book."

"Now, be off, be off!" Natasha drove him away, laughing. "Babbling away with delight!"

"Good-bye. In two hours' time I shall be with you."

He kissed her hand and hastened away.

"You see, you see, Vanya," said she, and melted into tears.

I stayed with her for about two hours, tried to comfort her and succeeded in reassuring her completely. Of course she was right about everything, in all her apprehensions. My heart was wrung with anguish when I thought of her present position; I was frightened about it. But what could be done?

Alyosha puzzled me, too. He loved her no less than before; perhaps, indeed, his feeling was stronger, more poignant, from remorse and gratitude. But at the same time his new passion was taking a strong hold on his heart. It was impossible to foresee how it would end. I myself felt awfully curious to see Katya. I promised Natasha again that I would make her acquaintance.

Natasha seemed to become almost cheerful at last. Among other things, I told her all about Nellie, about Masloboyev, and Bubnova, about my meeting Prince Valkovsky that morning at Masloboyev's and the appointment I had made with the latter at seven o'clock. All this interested her extremely. I did not talk about her

parents much, and said nothing for the present about her father's visit to me; his proposed duel with the prince might have frightened her. She, too, thought the prince's connection with Maslobojev very strange, as strange as his extraordinary desire to make friends with me, though this could be to some extent explained by the present situation.

I returned home at about three. Nellie met me with her sweet little face.

CHAPTER VI

At seven o'clock punctually I was at Maslobojev's. He greeted me with loud exclamations and open arms. He was, of course, half-drunk. But what struck me most was the extraordinary preparation that had been made for my visit. It was evident that I was expected. A pretty pinchbeck samovar was boiling on a little round table covered with a handsome and expensive tablecloth. The tea-table glittered with crystal, silver and china. On another table which was covered with a tablecloth of a different kind, but no less splendid, stood plates of very good sweets, Kiev preserves both dry and liquid, fruit-jellies, French jams, oranges, apples, and three or four kinds of nuts—in fact a regular fruit-shop. On a third table, covered with a snow-white cloth, a great variety of dishes was displayed—caviare, cheese, pâté, different kinds of sausage, smoked ham, fish—and a row of excellent cut-glass decanters containing spirits of many sorts and of the most attractive colours—green, ruby, brown and gold. Finally on a little table apart—also covered with a white cloth—there was champagne in ice buckets. On a table before the sofa there were three bottles containing Sauterne, Lafitte, and Cognac, very expensive brands from Yeliseyev's. Alexandra Semyonovna was sitting at the tea-table, and though her dress

and coiffure were simple, they had evidently been the subject of much thought and attention, and the result was indeed very successful. She knew what suited her, and apparently took pride in it. She got up to meet me with some ceremony. Her rosy face glowed with pleasure and gaiety. Masloboyev was wearing beautiful Chinese slippers, a rich dressing-gown, and fresh, foppish linen. Fashionable studs and buttons were conspicuous on his shirt everywhere where they could possibly be attached. His hair had been pomaded, and combed with a fashionable side parting.

I was so much taken aback that I stopped short in the middle of the room, and gazed open-mouthed, first at Masloboyev and then at Alexandra Semyonovna, who was in a state of blissful satisfaction.

"What's this, Masloboyev? Are you giving a party this evening?" I cried at last with some uneasiness.

"No, only you!" he answered solemnly.

"But why all this?" I asked (pointing to the dishes).

"Why, you've food enough for a regiment!"

"And drink enough! You've forgotten the chief thing—drink!" added Masloboyev.

"And is all this just on my account?"

"And Alexandra Semyonovna's. It was her pleasure to get it all up."

"Well, there he goes! I knew it!" exclaimed Alexandra Semyonovna, flushing, but losing none of her satisfied air.

"I can't receive a visitor decently, without being told off!"

"Ever since the morning, would you believe it, ever since this morning, as soon as she knew you were coming for the evening, she began bustling about; she's been in agonies...."

"And that's a lie too. Not since morning at all but since last night. When you came in last night you told me the gentleman was coming to spend the whole evening."

"You misunderstood me."

"Not a bit of it. That's what you said. I never tell lies. And why shouldn't I receive a guest properly? No one ever comes to see us, and yet we've got plenty of everything. Let the good folks see that we know how to live like people do."

"And above all see what a splendid hostess and house-keeper you are," added Maslobojev. "Imagine, my friend, poor me getting caught like this. She's crammed me into a linen shirt, stuck in studs, put on me slippers, Chinese dressing-gown—combed my hair herself and pomaded it with bergamot; she wanted to sprinkle me with scent—*crème brûlée*, but at that point I wouldn't stand any more, I rebelled and asserted my conjugal authority...."

"It wasn't bergamot at all. It was the best French pomatum out of a painted china pot," retorted Alexandra Semyonovna, flushing. "Judge for yourself, Ivan Petrovich; he never takes me to a theatre, or a dance, he only gives me dresses, and what's the good of dresses? I put them on and walk about the room alone. The other day I persuaded him to take me to the theatre and we were all ready to go; but the minute I turned away to fasten my brooch he darted to the sideboard, tossed off one glass and then another and soon was sozzled proper. That was the end of that. No one, no one, no one ever comes to see us! Only of a morning people of a sort come in about business, and I'm sent away. Yet we've samovars, and a dinner service and a good tea set—we've everything, all presents. And they bring us things to eat too, we hardly buy anything but the spirits, or that pomade, or the special things over there—the paste, the ham and sweets we bought for you. I wish someone could see how we live! I've been dreaming for a whole year that a visitor would come, a proper visitor, and we could show him all this and give him a good dinner. And he'd like it and we should be pleased too. And as for my pomading him, the stupid, he doesn't deserve it; he'd always go about in

dirty clothes. Look at the dressing-gown he's got on: it's a present. But does he deserve a dressing-gown like that? All he wants is to get drunk. You'll see, he'll be offering you vodka before tea."

"That's a good idea, what about it, Vanya? Let's have some of the silver seal and some of the gold, and then with our souls refreshed we'll attack the other beverages."

"There, I knew that's how it would be!"

"Don't you worry, my pet, we'll drink a cup of tea, too, with brandy in it, to your health."

"There, just as I thought!" she cried, throwing up her hands in despair. "It's caravan tea, six rubles the pound, a merchant made us a present of it the day before yesterday, and he wants to drink it with brandy. Don't listen to him, Ivan Petrovich, I'll pour you out a cup directly. You'll see . . . you'll see for yourself what tea it is!"

And she busied herself at the samovar.

It was obvious that they were counting on keeping me there the whole evening. Alexandra Semyonovna had been waiting for visitors for a whole year, and was now going to work it all off on me. This did not suit me at all.

"Listen, Maslobojev," I said, sitting down. "I've not come to pay you a visit at all. I've come on business; you invited me yourself to tell me something. . . ."

"Well, of course, business is business, but there's time for a friendly chat too."

"No, my friend, don't reckon upon me. At half past eight I must say good-bye. I've an appointment. I gave my word. . . ."

"Not likely. Good gracious, what are you doing to me! What are you doing to Alexandra Semyonovna! Just look at her: she's stunned. What has she been pomading me for: think of the bergamot I'm covered with!"

"You're always joking, Maslobojev. I swear to Alexandra Semyonovna that I'll dine with you next week, on Friday if you like. But now, old chap, I've given my word;

or rather it's absolutely necessary for me to be at a certain place. You'd better explain what you meant to tell me."

"You can't really be going at half past eight?" cried Alexandra Semyonovna in a timid and plaintive voice, almost weeping as she handed me a cup of excellent tea.

"Don't worry, my pet; that's all nonsense!" Maslobojev put in. "He'll stay, that's nonsense. But, Vanya, you'd much better tell me where is it you're always hurrying off to? What is it you're so busy with? May I know? You keep running off somewhere every day, you do no work. . . ."

"But why do you want to know? However, I'll tell you afterwards perhaps. And now you'd better explain why you came to see me yesterday when I told you myself I shouldn't be at home."

"I remembered afterwards, but I forgot at the time. I really did want to speak to you about something. But above everything I wanted to please Alexandra Semyonovna. 'Here,' says she, 'is somebody, a friend, who has turned up. Why don't you invite him?' And here she's been pestering me about you for the last four days. No doubt they'll let me off forty sins for the bergamot in the next world, but I thought why shouldn't we really spend an evening like friends do? So I used stratagem: I wrote to you that it was that kind of business that if you didn't come it would quite upset our apple-cart."

I begged him to refrain from doing so in future, but to tell me plainly instead. But his explanation did not altogether satisfy me.

"Well, and why did you run away from me this morning?" I asked.

"This morning I really had business, that's honest truth."

"Not with the prince by any chance?"

"Now do you like our tea?" Alexandra Semyonovna asked, in honeyed accents. For the last five minutes she

had been waiting for me to praise her tea, but it had not occurred to me.

"It's splendid, Alexandra Semyonovna, superb. I have never drunk anything like it."

Alexandra Semyonovna positively glowed with pleasure and flew to pour me out some more.

"The prince!" cried Maslobojev, "that prince, brother, is a rogue, a rascal such as.... Well! I can tell you, brother, though I'm a rogue myself, from a mere sense of decency I shouldn't care to be in his skin. But enough. Mum's the word! That's all I can tell you about him."

"But I've come purposely to ask you about him among other things. But that can wait. Now, tell me, why did you give my Yelena sweets and dance for her when I was away yesterday? And what can you have been talking about for an hour and a half!"

"Yelena is a little girl of twelve, or perhaps eleven, who is living for the time at Ivan Petrovich's," Maslobojev explained, suddenly turning to Alexandra Semyonovna. "Look, Vanya, look," he went on, pointing his finger at her, "how she flushed up when she heard I had taken sweets to an unknown girl. Didn't she give a start and turn red as though we'd fired a pistol suddenly? See her eyes flashing, shooting off sparks! It's no use, Alexandra Semyonovna, it's no use to try and hide it! You're jealous all right. If I hadn't explained that it was a child of eleven she'd have pulled my hair out and the bergamot wouldn't have saved me!"

"It won't save you as it is!"

And with these words Alexandra Semyonovna darted at one bound from behind the tea-table, and before Maslobojev had time to protect his head she snatched a tuft of his hair and gave it a good pull.

"There! There! Don't dare say I'm jealous before a visitor! Don't you dare! Don't you dare! Don't you dare."

She was quite crimson, and though she was laughing, Maslobojev caught it pretty hotly.

"He talks of all sorts of shameful things," she added seriously, turning to me.

"Well, Vanya, you see the sort of life I lead! That calls for a little drop of vodka," Maslobojev concluded, smoothing down his hair and going almost at a trot for the decanter. But Alexandra Semyonovna forestalled him; she rushed to the table, poured some out herself, handed it to him, and even gave him a friendly pat on the cheek. Maslobojev winked at me triumphantly, clicked his tongue, and solemnly emptied his glass.

"As for the sweets, it's difficult to say," he began, sitting down on the sofa beside me. "I bought them at a greengrocer's the other day when I was drunk. I don't know why. Perhaps it was to support home industries and manufactures, I don't know for sure; I only remember that I was walking along the street drunk, fell in the mud, tore at my hair and wept at being unfit for anything. I forgot about the sweets, of course, so they remained in my pocket till yesterday when I sat down on your sofa and sat on them. The same inebriety was responsible for the dances, too. Yesterday I was rather drunk, and when I am drunk, if I'm contented with my lot I sometimes dance. That's all. Except perhaps that that little orphan aroused my pity; besides, she wouldn't talk to me, she seemed cross. And so I danced to cheer her up and gave her the fruit-drops."

"And you weren't bribing her to try and find something out from her? Own up, honestly, didn't you come on purpose knowing I shouldn't be at home, to talk to her tête-à-tête, and to get something out of her? You see, I know you spent an hour and a half with her, convinced her that you had known her dead mother, and questioned her about something."

Maslobojev screwed up his eyes and laughed roguishly.

"Well, it wouldn't have been a bad idea," he said. "No, Vanya, it wasn't that. That is, why shouldn't I question her if I got a chance; but it wasn't that. Listen, ancient friend, though I'm rather drunk now, as usual, yet you may be sure that with *evil intent*, Filip will never deceive you, with *evil intent, that is.*"

"Well, and without evil intent?"

"Well . . . even without evil intent. But, damn it all, let's have a drink and then to business. It's not a matter of much consequence," he went on after a drink; "that Bubnova woman had no sort of right to keep the girl; I've gone into it all. There was no adoption or anything of that kind. The mother owed her money, and so she got hold of the child. Although the Bubnova woman's a sly vixen and a nasty wretch, she's a foolish female like all females. The dead woman had a valid passport and so everything's all right there. Yelena can live with you, though it would be a very good thing if some benevolent family would take her for good and bring her up. But meanwhile she can stay with you. That's all right, I'll arrange it all for you, Bubnova won't dare lift a finger. I've found out scarcely anything definite about Yelena's mother though. She was somebody's widow, Salzmann by name."

"Yes, so Nellie told me too."

"Well, so there the matter ends. Now, Vanya," he began with a certain solemnity, "I've a little favour to ask of you. Mind you grant it. Tell me as fully as you can what it is you're busy about, where you go and where you spend whole days at a time. Though I have heard something and know a little, but I have to know about it much more fully."

Such solemnity surprised me and even made me uneasy.

"But what is it? Why do you want to know? You're asking so solemnly."

"Here you are, Vanya, without wasting words: I want to do you a service. You see, old chap, if I weren't straight

with you I would have managed to get it all out of you without any solemnity. And yet you suspect me of double-crossing you—just now, those fruit-drops; I understood, you know. But since I'm speaking with such solemnity, you may be sure it's not my interest but yours I'm thinking of. So don't doubt me and tell me plainly the whole honest truth."

"But what sort of service? Listen, Masloboyev, why won't you tell me anything about the prince? I must know about him. That would be a service to me."

"About the prince? Hm! Very well, I'll tell you straight: I'm questioning you now in connection with the prince."

"How so?"

"I'll tell you how. I've noticed, my boy, that he seems to be somehow mixed up in your affairs; by the way, he questioned me about you. How he found out that we knew each other is not your business. The only thing that matters is that you should be on your guard against that prince. He's a treacherous Judas, and worse than that too. And so, when I saw that he was mixed up in your affairs I trembled for you. But of course I know nothing about it; that's why I asked you to tell me, so that I may judge. And that's why I asked you to come here today. That's what my important business is; I'm telling you frankly."

"You must tell me something, anyway, at least tell me why I need beware of the prince."

"Very good, so be it. I am sometimes employed in certain matters. But judge for yourself: some people entrust their affairs to me just because I'm not a chatter-box; how could I tell you then? So you mustn't mind if I speak somewhat generally, very generally in fact, simply to show what a scoundrel he is. Well, to begin with, you tell your story."

I decided there was really no need to conceal anything

in my affairs from Maslobojev. Natasha's story was not a secret; moreover Maslobojev might be able to help her in some way. Of course I passed over certain points as far as possible in my story. Maslobojev listened with particular attention to all that related to Prince Valkovsky; he interrupted me often, asked me about several points over again, so that in the end I told him the story rather fully. The telling of it lasted half an hour.

"Hm! That girl's got a head on her shoulders," Maslobojev commented. "If she hasn't guessed quite correctly about the prince, it's a good thing anyway that she recognized from the first the sort of man she had to deal with, and broke off all relations with him. Good show, Natalya Nikolayevna! I drink to her health." (He emptied his glass.) "It's not only brains, it must have been her heart too, that saved her from being deceived. And her heart didn't mislead her. Of course her case is lost; the prince will get his way and Alyosha will leave her. I'm only sorry for Ikhmenev—to pay ten thousand to that scoundrel! Why, who took up his case, who acted for him? Managed it himself, I bet! My, my! Just like all these honourable, hot-headed people! They're no good for anything! That wasn't the right way to deal with the prince. I'd have found a nice little lawyer for Ikhmenev—too bad!"

And he thumped on the table with vexation.

"Well, now about the prince."

"Still harping on the prince, are you? But what's the good of talking about him! I'm sorry I suggested it. I only wanted, Vanya, to warn you against that swindler, to protect you, so to say, from his influence. No one is safe who comes in contact with him. So keep your eyes open, that's all. And here you've been imagining I had some mysteries of Paris I wanted to reveal to you. One can see you're a novelist. Well, what's the good of talking about the villain? A villain he is—what more? Well,

for example, I'll tell you one of his little affairs, of course without mentioning places, towns, or persons, that is, without the exactitude of a calendar. You know that when he was very young and had to live on his salary, he married a very rich merchant's daughter. Well, he didn't treat that lady too courteously, and though we're not discussing her case now, I'll mention in passing, friend Vanya, that all his life he's been particularly fond of turning such affairs to profit. Here's another example of it. He went abroad. There...."

"Wait, Maslobojev, what journey abroad are you speaking of? In what year?"

"Exactly ninety-nine years and three months ago. Well, there he seduced the daughter of a certain father, and carried her off with him to Paris. And the way he did it too! The father was some sort of a manufacturer, or was a partner in some enterprise of that sort. I don't know for sure. You know I'm only telling you what I've gathered from my own conjectures, and what I've deduced from various facts. Well, the prince cheated him, worming himself into his business too. He swindled him out and out, and got hold of his money. The old man, of course, had some legal documents to prove that the prince had taken the money from him. But the prince wanted to take it so that he wouldn't have to give it back, that is, in plain words, to steal it. The old man had a daughter, and she was a beauty, and there was an ideal man in love with her, one of the Schiller brotherhood, a poet, and at the same time a merchant, a young dreamer; in short a regular German, one Pfefferkuchen."

"Do you mean to say Pfefferkuchen was his surname?"

"Well, perhaps it wasn't Pfefferkuchen; hang the man, he doesn't matter. But the prince made up to the daughter, and so successfully that she fell madly in love with him. The prince then desired two things: first to possess the daughter, and secondly the documents relating to the

money he had taken from the old man. All the old man's keys were in his daughter's keeping. The old man was passionately fond of his daughter, so much so that he didn't want her to marry anyone. Yes, really. He was jealous of every suitor she had, he couldn't imagine parting with her, and he turned Pfefferkuchen out. He was a queer fish the father, an Englishman. . . ."

"An Englishman? But where did it all happen?"

"I only called him an Englishman, speaking figuratively, and you catch me up at once. It happened in the town of Santa-fe-da-Bogota, or perhaps it was Cracow, but more likely it was in the principality of Nassau, like the label on the seltzer-water bottles; certainly it was Nassau, does that satisfy you? Well, so the prince carried the girl off from her father, and managed to induce the girl to lay hands on certain documents and take them with her. There is love like that, you know, Vanya. Good gracious me! And she was an honest girl, you know, honourable and lofty-minded. It's true she very likely didn't know much about documents. The only thing that troubled her was that her father might curse her. The prince was equal to the occasion this time too; he gave her a formal, legal promise of marriage in writing. By so doing he persuaded her that they were only going abroad for a time, for a holiday tour, and that when the old father's anger had subsided they would return to him already married, and the three of them would live happily ever after, and so on, to infinity. She ran away, the old father cursed her and went bankrupt. Frauenmilch dragged along to Paris after her, chucking up everything, chucking up his business even; he was very much in love with her."

"Stop, who's Frauenmilch?"

"Why, that fellow! Feuerbach, wasn't it? Damn the fellow, Pfefferkuchen! Well, of course, the prince couldn't

marry her: what will Countess Khlestova* have to say? What will Baron Slops think? So he had to deceive her. And that's what he did, too, brazenly. To begin with he all but beat her, and secondly, he purposely invited Pfefferkuchen to visit them. Well, he began coming to see them and became her friend. They would spend whole evenings alone, whimpering together, weeping over their misfortunes, and he would comfort her; you know, those dear, simple souls! The prince arranged things this way on purpose: once, he came upon them late at night, and accused them of having an intrigue, he found some pretext: said he'd seen it with his own eyes. Well, he turned them both out of the house, and took his departure to London for a time. She was just on the eve of her confinement; when he turned her out she gave birth to a daughter, that is, not a daughter but a son, to be sure, a little boy. He was christened Volodka. Pfefferkuchen stood godfather. Well, so she went off with Pfefferkuchen. He had a bit of money. She travelled in Switzerland and Italy, through all those poetical places—most appropriately. She cried all the time, and Pfefferkuchen whimpered, and many years passed like that, and the baby grew into a little girl. And everything went right for the prince too, only one thing was wrong, he hadn't succeeded in getting back the promise of marriage. 'You're a base man,' she had said to him at parting. 'You have robbed me, you have dishonoured me and now you abandon me. Good-bye. But I won't give you back your promise. Not because I'd ever want to marry you, but because you're afraid of that document. So I shall always keep it in my hands.' She lost her temper, in fact, but the prince's mind was easy. Such scoundrels always come off well in their dealings with the so-called lofty souls. They're so honourable that it's always easy to deceive them, and besides

* The Russian "Mrs. Grundy."—*Tr.*

they invariably confine themselves to lofty and noble contempt instead of practically applying the law to the case if it can be applied. That young mother, for instance, she took refuge in proud contempt, and though she kept the promise of marriage, the prince knew, of course, that she'd sooner hang herself than make use of it; so he felt secure for the time. And though she spat in his nasty face, so to speak, she had her Volodka left on her hands; if she died what would become of him? But she didn't think about that. Bruderschaft, too, encouraged her and didn't think about it. They read Schiller instead. At last Bruderschaft sickened of something and died. . . ."

"You mean Pfefferkuchen?"

"To be sure—hang him! And she. . . ."

"Wait a minute, how many years had they been traveling?"

"Exactly two hundred. Well, she went back to Cracow. Her father wouldn't receive her, cursed her, she died, and the prince crossed himself for joy. I was there too, drank goblets not a few, our ears full of mead, but our mouths full of need; they gave me a flip, and I gave them the slip. . . . Let's drink, brother Vanya."

"I suspect that you are acting for him in that business, Maslobojev."

"You will have it so, will you?"

"But I can't understand what you can do about it."

"Well, you see, when she came back under another name to Madrid after being away for ten years, all this had to be verified, and about Bruderschaft too, and about the old man, and whether she had really come back, and about the kid, and whether she was dead, and whether she'd any papers, and so on, to infinity. And something else besides, too. He's a most rotten man, be on your guard, Vanya, and remember one thing about Maslobojev, don't ever, under any circumstances call him a scoundrel! Though he is a scoundrel (to my thinking

there's no man who isn't) he's not a scoundrel in his dealings with you. I'm very drunk, but listen: if ever, sooner or later, now or next year, it seems to you that Maslobojev has hoodwinked you (and please don't forget that word *hoodwinked*) rest assured that it's with no evil intent. Maslobojev is watching over you. And so don't believe your suspicions, but come to Maslobojev and have it out with him like a brother. Well, now, will you have a drink?"

"No."

"Something to eat?"

"No, old man, excuse me. . . ."

"Well then, get along with you. It's a quarter to nine and you're in a hurry. It's time for you to go."

"Well, what next? He's drunk himself stupid and now he's turning our guest out! He's always like that. Oh, you shameless fellow!" cried Alexandra Semyonovna, almost in tears.

"A man on foot's poor company for a man on horseback, Alexandra Semyonovna, we shall be left alone and shall adore one another. And this is a general! No, Vanya, I'm lying, you're not a general, but I'm a scoundrel! Only see what I look like now! What am I beside you? Forgive me, Vanya, don't judge me and let me pour out. . . ."

He embraced me and burst into tears. I began taking my leave.

"Oh, good Lord! And we've prepared supper for you!" cried Alexandra Semyonovna in terrible distress. "And will you really come to us on Friday?"

"I will, Alexandra Semyonovna. Word of honour, I will."

"Perhaps you look down on him because he's so . . . drunk. Don't look down upon him, Ivan Petrovich! He's a good-hearted man, such a good-hearted man, and he thinks so much of you. He talks to me about you day and

night, nothing but you. He bought your books specially for me. I haven't read them yet; I'll begin tomorrow. And how glad I shall be when you come! I never see anyone. No one ever comes to spend an evening with us. We've everything we can want, but we're always alone. Here I've been sitting listening all the while you were talking, and how nice it's been. . . . So good-bye till Friday."

CHAPTER VII

I went out and hurried home. Maslobojev's words had made a great impression on me. All sorts of ideas occurred to me. . . . As luck would have it, at home an incident awaited me which startled me like an electric shock.

There was a street-lamp exactly opposite the gate of the house where I lodged. Just as I was in the gateway a strange figure rushed at me from under the street-lamp, so strange that I uttered a cry. It was a living thing, terror-stricken, shaking, half-crazed, and it clutched at my hand with a scream. I was overwhelmed with horror. It was Nellie.

"Nellie, what is it?" I cried. "What's the matter?"

"There, upstairs . . . he's in our . . . rooms."

"Who is it? Come along, come with me."

"I won't, I won't. I'll wait till he's gone . . . in the passage . . . I won't."

I went up to my room with a strange foreboding in my heart, opened the door and saw Prince Valkovsky. He was sitting at the table reading my novel. At least, the book was open.

"Ivan Petrovich," he cried, delighted. "I'm so glad you've come back at last. I was on the very point of going away. I've been waiting over an hour for you. I promised the countess at her earnest and particular wish to bring

you to see her this evening. She begged me so specially, she's so anxious to make your acquaintance. And as you had already promised me I thought I would come to you earlier before you'd had time to go out anywhere, and invite you to come with me. Imagine my distress: when I arrived your servant told me you were not at home. What could I do? I had given my word of honour that I'd bring you along, and so I sat down to wait for you, thinking I'd wait a quarter of an hour. But it's been a long quarter of an hour! I opened your novel and forgot the time, reading it. Ivan Petrovich! It's a masterpiece! They don't appreciate you enough! You've drawn tears from me, do you know? Yes, I've been crying, and I don't often cry."

"So you want me to come? I must confess that just now . . . not that I'm against it, but. . . ."

"For God's sake, let us go! Think what you're doing to me! Why, I have been waiting an hour and a half for you. Besides, I do so want to talk to you. You know what about. You understand the whole affair better than I do. Perhaps we shall decide on something, come to some conclusion. Only think of it! For God's sake, don't refuse."

I reflected that sooner or later I should have to go. Of course Natasha was alone now, and needed me, but she had herself charged me to get to know Katya as soon as possible. Besides, Alyosha might be there too. I knew that Natasha would not be satisfied till I had brought her news of Katya, and I decided to go. But I was worried about Nellie.

"Wait a minute," I said to the prince, and I went out on the stairs. Nellie was standing there in a dark corner.

"Why won't you come in, Nellie? What has he done? What has he said to you?"

"Nothing . . . I don't want to, I won't . . ." she repeated. "I'm afraid."

Hard as I tried to persuade her, nothing was of any use. We finally agreed that as soon as I had gone out with the prince she would return and lock herself in.

"And don't let anyone in, Nellie, however much they try and persuade you."

"But are you going with him?"

"Yes."

She shuddered and clutched at my arm, as though to beg me not to go, but she didn't utter one word. I decided to question her more minutely next day.

Apologizing to the prince, I started to dress. He began assuring me that I had no need to dress, no need to get myself up to go to the countess.

"Perhaps something a little more fresh," he added, eyeing me inquisitorially from head to foot. "You know . . . these conventional prejudices . . . it's impossible to be rid of them altogether. It'll be a long time before we get to that ideal state in our society," he concluded, noting with satisfaction that I possessed a dress-coat.

We went out. But I left him on the stairs, went back into the room into which Nellie had already slipped, and said good-bye to her again. She was terribly agitated. There were bluish shadows on her face. I was worried about her; I disliked having to leave her.

"That's a queer servant you've got," the prince said as we went downstairs. "That little girl is your servant, isn't she?"

"No . . . she . . . is staying with me for the time."

"Queer little girl. I'm sure she's mad. Only fancy, at first she answered me civilly, but afterwards when she'd had a look at me she rushed at me, screaming and trembling, clawed at me . . . tried to say something, but couldn't. I must own I was scared. I wanted to escape from her, but thank God she ran away herself. I was astounded. How do you manage to get on with her?"

"She is ill with epilepsy," I explained.

"Ah, so that's what it is! Well, it's no wonder then . . . if she has fits."

It suddenly struck me here that Masloboyev's visit of the previous day when he knew I was not at home, my visit to Masloboyev that morning, the story that Masloboyev had just told me, in a state of inebriety and with great reluctance, his invitation for me to come at seven o'clock that evening, his urging me not to believe that he could hoodwink me and, finally, the prince's waiting for an hour and a half for me while perhaps he knew I was at Masloboyev's, and Nellie's rushing away from him into the street—that all these facts were somehow connected. I had plenty to think about.

The prince's carriage was waiting at the gate. We got in and drove off.

CHAPTER VIII

We had not far to go, to the Torgovy Bridge. For the first minute we were silent. I was wondering how he would begin. I fancied that he would try me, sound me, probe me. But he spoke without any beating about the bush, and went straight to the point.

"I am very uneasy about one circumstance, Ivan Petrovich," he began, "about which I want to speak to you first of all, and to ask your advice. I have long since made up my mind to forego what I have won from my lawsuit and to give up the disputed ten thousand to Ikhmenev. How shall I do it?"

"It cannot be that you really don't know how to act," was the thought that flashed through my mind. "Are you perhaps making fun of me?"

"I don't know, prince," I answered as simply as I could; "in something else, that is, in anything concerning Natalya Nikolayevna, I am ready to give you any

information likely to be of use to you and to all of us, but in this matter you must, of course, know better than I do."

"No, no, I certainly know much less than you do. You know them, and perhaps Natalya Nikolayevna herself may have given you her views on the subject more than once, and they would be my guiding principle. You can be a great help to me; it's an extremely difficult matter. I am prepared to give up the money, I'm even determined to do it, however other matters may end—you understand? But how, and in what form, am I to return the money? That's the question. The old man's proud and obstinate. Very likely he'll insult me for my good nature, and throw the money in my face."

"But, look here, how do you regard that money? As your own or as his?"

"I won the lawsuit, so the money's mine."

"But in your conscience?"

"Of course I regard it as mine," he answered somewhat piqued at my unceremoniousness. "But I believe you don't know all the facts of the case. I don't accuse the old man of intentional duplicity, and I will confess I've never accused him of that. It was his own choice to take it as an insult. He was to blame for carelessness, for bad management of the business entrusted to him, and by our agreement he was bound to be responsible for some of his mistakes. But, do you know, even that's not really the point: what was really at the bottom of it was our quarrel, our mutual recriminations at the time, in fact, wounded vanity on both sides. I might not have taken any notice of that paltry ten thousand, but you know, of course, how the whole case began and what it arose from. I'm ready to admit that I was suspicious and perhaps wrong (that is, wrong at the time), but I wasn't aware of it, and in my vexation, insulted by his rudeness, I was unwilling to let the chance slip, and began the

lawsuit. You may perhaps think all that not very honourable on my part. I'm not defending myself; I shall only say that anger, or still more, wounded pride, does not yet constitute a lack of honour, but is a natural and human thing. I confess, I repeat again, that I hardly knew Ikhmenev at all, and believed implicitly in those rumours about Alyosha and his daughter, and so I was also able to believe that the money had been intentionally stolen. But putting that aside, the real question is, what am I to do now? I might refuse the money, but if at the same time I say that I still consider my claim was a just one, it means that I'm making him a gift of the money. Now and to this the delicate position in regard to Natalya Nikolayevna ... he'll certainly fling the money in my face."

"There, you see, you say yourself he'll *fling* it in your face; so you do consider him an honest man, and that's why you can be perfectly certain that he did not steal your money. And if so, why shouldn't you go to him and tell him openly that you consider your claim unjustified. That would be honourable, and Ikhmenev would not perhaps find it difficult then to accept *his* money."

"Hm! *His* money ... that's just the question; what sort of position do you put me into? Go to him and tell him I consider my claim unjustified. 'Why did you make it then, if you considered it unjustified?' that's what everyone would say to my face. And I've not deserved it, for my claim was legal. I have never said or written that he stole the money, but I am still convinced of his carelessness, his negligence, and bad management. That money is undoubtedly mine, and therefore it would be mortifying to make a false charge against myself, and finally, I repeat, the old man himself chose to take it as an insult, and you want to force me to beg his pardon for that insult—that's rather hard."

"It seems to me that if two men want to become reconciled, then...."

"You think it's easy?"

"Yes."

"No, sometimes it's very far from easy, especially...."

"Especially if there are other circumstances connected with it. Yes, there I agree with you, prince. The problem of Natalya Nikolayevna and your son has to be settled by you in all those points that depend upon you, and settled to the full satisfaction of the Ikhmenevs. Only then you can have it out with Ikhmenev about the lawsuit too. But now, since nothing has been settled yet, you have only one course open to you: to acknowledge the injustice of your claim, and to acknowledge it openly, and if necessary even publicly—that is my opinion. I tell you so frankly because you asked me my opinion yourself, and I suppose you do not wish me to be wily with you. And this also gives me the courage to ask you why you are troubling your head about returning this money to Ikhmenev. If you consider that you were just in your claim, why return it? Forgive my being so inquisitive, but this has such an intimate bearing upon other circumstances."

"And tell me," he asked suddenly, as though he had not heard my question, "are you quite sure old Ikhmenev will refuse the ten thousand if it's handed to him without any of these embellishments, and ... and ... and blandishments?"

"Of course he will refuse it."

I flared up and positively trembled with indignation. This impudently sceptical question affected me as though he had spat into my face. This insult was augmented by the rude, aristocratic manner in which, without answering my question, and apparently without noticing it, he interrupted it with another, probably to give me to understand that I had gone too far and had been too familiar

in venturing to ask him such a question. I detested, I loathed that aristocratic manoeuvre and had done my utmost in the past to get Alyosha out of it.

"Hm! You are too impulsive, and things are not always done in real life as you imagine," the prince observed calmly, at my exclamation. "But I think that Natalya Nikolayevna might do something to decide the question; tell her of this. She might give some advice."

"She won't," I answered harshly. "You did not deign to listen to what I was saying to you just now, but interrupted me. Natalya Nikolayevna will understand that if you are returning the money insincerely and without all those *blandishments*, as you call them, it will mean that you are paying the father for the loss of his daughter, and her for the loss of Alyosha—in other words—you're giving them money compensation."

"Hm!... so that's how you understand me, my excellent Ivan Petrovich," the prince laughed. Why did he laugh?

"And yet," he went on, "there are so many, many things we have to talk over together. But now there's no time. I only beg you to understand *one thing*: the matter concerns Natalya Nikolayevna and her whole future directly, and all this depends to some extent on what we decide and agree upon. You are indispensable, you'll see for yourself. So if you are still devoted to Natalya Nikolayevna, you can't refuse to hold discussions with me, however little sympathy you may feel for me. But here we are ... *à bientôt*."

CHAPTER IX

The countess lived in good style. The rooms were furnished comfortably and with taste, though not gorgeously at all. Everything, however, spoke of it being a temporary residence; it was simply a decent house for

a spell and not the permanent established habitation of a wealthy family with all the luxury of the landed gentry, and all the whims that they take for necessities. There was a rumour that for the summer the countess was going to her estate ruined and mortgaged many times over in the province of Simbirsk, and that the prince would accompany her. I had heard this already, and wondered uneasily what Alyosha would do when Katya went away with the countess. I had not yet spoken of this to Natasha, I was afraid to, but I had noticed certain signs in her to show that she, too, knew of the rumour. But she said nothing and suffered in silence.

The countess received me very well, held out her hand to me cordially, and repeated that she had long wished to make my acquaintance. She poured out the tea herself from a handsome silver samovar, round which we all sat, the prince, and I and another gentleman—elderly and wearing a star on his breast, somewhat starchy, extremely aristocratic, and diplomatic in his manners. This gentleman seemed to be held in great respect. The countess had not, since her return from abroad, that winter, made a large circle of acquaintances in Petersburg or established her position as she had hoped and reckoned upon doing. This gentleman was the only caller, and no one else came in all the evening. I looked about for Kate-rina Fyodorovna; she was in the next room with Alyosha, but on hearing that we had arrived she came in at once. The prince kissed her hand courteously, and the countess motioned her towards me. The prince at once introduced us. I gazed at her with impatient earnestness. She was a delicate little blonde dressed in a white frock, with a mild and serene expression of face, and eyes of a perfect blue, as Alyosha had said; she had the beauty of youth, that was all. I had expected to meet the perfection of beauty, but she was not beautiful at all. A good, softly outlined oval of the face, fairly regular features, thick

and really splendid hair, dressed in a simple and homely style, a gentle, steady look in the eyes—all this I should have passed by without paying any special attention to it if I had met her elsewhere; but this was only the first impression, and in the course of that evening I made rather a good study of her. The very way in which she offered me her hand, looking into my face with a sort of naively exaggerated intentness, without saying a word, impressed me by its strangeness, and I could not help smiling at her. I must have instantly sensed that I had before me a creature of the purest heart. The countess watched her keenly. After shaking hands Katya walked away from me somewhat hurriedly, and sat down at the other end of the room with Alyosha. As he greeted me Alyosha whispered: "I'm only here for a minute. I'm just going *there*."

The "diplomat," I don't know his name and call him a diplomat simply to call him something, talked calmly and majestically, developing some idea. The countess listened to him attentively. The prince would smile now and again with an expression of ingratiating approval. The orator often addressed himself to him, apparently appreciating him as a worthy listener. I was given some tea and left in peace, for which I was very thankful. Meanwhile I was studying the countess. At first sight she attracted me in spite of myself. Perhaps she was not so young, but to me she seemed not more than twenty-eight. Her face was still fresh, and in her first youth, she must have been very beautiful. Her dark brown hair was still fairly thick; her expression was extremely kindly, but frivolous, and mischievously mocking somehow. But just now she was evidently keeping herself in check for some reason. Her eyes shone with great intelligence, too, but even more with good nature and gaiety. It seemed to me that her predominant characteristic was a certain levity, an eagerness for enjoyment, and a sort of good-natured

egoism; a great deal of egoism, perhaps. She was absolutely guided by the prince, who had an extraordinary influence on her. I knew that they had a liaison, I had heard, too, that he had been anything but a jealous lover while they had been abroad; but I fancied then, and I think so still, that apart from these relations there was something else, some rather mysterious tie binding them together, something like a mutual obligation resting upon motives of self-interest . . . in fact there certainly was something of the sort. I knew, too, that by now the prince was tired of her, and yet their relations had not been broken off. Perhaps what kept them together especially was their scheming for Katya's fortune, which must have undoubtedly owed its initiative to the prince. By persuading her to help him bring about Alyosha's marriage with her stepdaughter, the prince had managed to get out of marrying the countess, which she really had urged upon him. So, at least, I concluded from remarks dropped in all simplicity by Alyosha, who was capable of some observation, after all. I fancied, too, partly from those remarks of Alyosha's again, that although the countess was completely dominated by the prince he had some reason for being afraid of her. Even Alyosha had noticed this. I learnt afterwards that the prince was very anxious to get the countess married off to someone else, and that it was partly with that object he was sending her away to Simbirsk, hoping to find a suitable husband for her in the provinces.

I sat and listened, wondering how I could have a *tête-à-tête* talk with Katerina Fyodorovna as soon as possible. The diplomat was answering some question of the countess's about the present situation, about the reforms that were being introduced and whether they were to be dreaded or not. He spoke a good deal and at great length, calmly, like one having authority. He developed his idea subtly and cleverly, but the idea was a repulsive one. He

kept insisting that the whole spirit of reform and improvement would only too soon bring forth certain results, that seeing those results "they would come to their senses," and that not only in society (that is, of course in a certain part of it) would this spirit of reform pass away, but they would learn their mistake from experience, and then with redoubled energy would return to the old traditions; that the experience, though distressing, would be of great benefit, because it would teach them to maintain that salutary tradition, would give fresh grounds for doing so, and that consequently it was only to be hoped that the extreme limit of recklessness would be reached as soon as possible. "They cannot do without us," he concluded, "no society has ever existed without us. We shall lose nothing. On the contrary, we stand to win. We shall rise to the surface, we certainly shall, and our motto at the moment should be "*pire ça va, mieux ça est!*" The prince smiled to him with revolting sympathy. The orator was completely satisfied with himself. I was so stupid as to be about to protest; I was fuming. But what checked me was the malignant expression of the prince; he stole a glance in my direction, and it seemed to me that he was actually expecting some queer and youthful outburst from me. Perhaps he even wanted this in order to enjoy my compromising myself. At the same time I felt convinced that the diplomat would not notice my protest, nor perhaps me either. I felt wretched sitting with them; but Alyosha rescued me.

He came up to me quietly, touched me on the shoulder, and asked to have a few words with me. I guessed he came as Katya's messenger. And so he did. A minute later I was sitting beside her. At first she scrutinized me intently from head to toe as though saying to herself: "So that's what you're like," and for the first minute neither of us could find words to begin our conversation. I felt sure, however, that once she started talking she

would be ready to go on without a stop till next morning. The "mere five or six hours' talk" of which Alyosha had spoken came back to my mind. Alyosha sat by us, waiting impatiently for us to begin.

"Why don't you say anything?" he began, looking at us with a smile. "Here they've met and don't say a thing."

"Oh, Alyosha, how can you . . . we'll begin directly," answered Katya. "You know, there are so many things we've got to talk about, Ivan Petrovich, that I don't know where to begin. We've been late in getting to know one another; we ought to have met long ago, though I've known you for ages. And I was so anxious to see you! I was even thinking of writing you a letter."

"What about?" I asked, smiling involuntarily.

"Any number of things," she answered earnestly. "Well, for instance, to know whether it's true what Alyosha says, that Natalya Nikolayevna does not mind his leaving her alone at such a time. Can anyone behave as he does? Why are you here now, tell me that, please?"

"Why, good heavens, I'm just going! I said I'd only stay here a minute, simply to have a look at the two of you together, and see how you talk to one another, and then I'll be off to Natasha."

"Well, here we are, sitting here together—see? He's always like that," she added, flushing a little and pointing her finger at him. "'One minute,' he always says, 'just one minute'; and, before you know it it's midnight and then it's too late to go there. 'She won't be angry,' he says, 'she's kind.' That's his argument! Is that right now? Is that honourable?"

"Well, I think I'll go," Alyosha responded plaintively, "but I do want dreadfully to stay with you two."

"What do you want with us? On the contrary, we must talk of lots of things alone. Now, look, don't be cross. It's necessary—can you understand that?"

"If it's necessary I'll be off at once—what is there to be cross at? I'll just look in for a minute on Lyovinka, and then go on to her at once. I say, Ivan Petrovich," he added, taking up his hat to go, "do you know that my father wants to give up the money he won by his lawsuit with Ikhmenev?"

"I know. He told me."

"How generous of him to do that. Now Katya won't believe that he's acting generously. Talk to her about it. Good-bye, Katya, and please don't doubt that I love Natasha. And why do you all thrust these conditions at me, scold me, and watch me—as though I were under your surveillance. She knows how I love her, and is sure of me, and I'm sure that she's sure of me. I love her, apart from anything, apart from any obligations. I don't know how I love her, I simply love her. And so there's no need to question me as though I were the accused. You can ask Ivan Petrovich, he's here now and he will confirm what I say, that Natasha's jealous, and though she loves me very much there's a great deal of egoism in her love, for she will never sacrifice anything for me."

"What's that?" I asked in amazement, hardly able to believe my ears.

"What are you saying, Alyosha?" Katya cried out, clasping her hands.

"Why, what is there so surprising in that? Ivan Petrovich knows it. She's always demanding that I should stay with her. Not that she demands it, exactly, but it's obvious that's what she wants."

"Aren't you ashamed? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" said Katya, flaring up with anger.

"What is there to be ashamed of? What a strange girl you are, really, Katya! I love her more than she thinks, and if she really loved me as I love her, she certainly would sacrifice her pleasure to me. It's true she lets me go herself, but I see from her face that she hates doing

it, so that it comes to the same thing as if she didn't let me."

"Oh, there's something behind that," cried Katya, turning to me again with flashing, angry eyes. "Own up, Alyosha, own up at once, it's your father who has put all that into your head. He's been talking to you today, hasn't he? And please don't try and deceive me: I shall know at once! Is it so or not?"

"Yes, he has been talking to me," Alyosha answered in confusion, "what of it? He talked in such a kind and friendly way today, and kept praising her to me. I was quite surprised, in fact, that he should praise her like that after she had insulted him so."

"And you, you believed it?" said I. "You, for whom she has given up everything she could give up, and even now, this very day, all her anxiety was on your account, that you might not be bored, that you might not be deprived of seeing Katerina Fyodorovna! She told me that herself today. And suddenly you believed those false insinuations. Aren't you ashamed?"

"Ungrateful boy! But what's the use, he's never ashamed of anything," said Katya, dismissing him with a wave of her hand, as though he were lost beyond all hope.

"But really, how you talk!" Alyosha continued in a plaintive voice. "And you're always like that, Katya! You're always suspecting me of nothing but evil.... To say nothing of Ivan Petrovich! You think I don't love Natasha. I didn't mean that when I said she was an egoist. I only meant that she loves me too much, so that it's all out of proportion, and it makes it hard for me and for her too. And my father could never take me in even if he wanted to. I won't let him. He didn't say she was an egoist in any bad sense; I understood him. He said exactly what I said just now: that she loves me so much too strongly, so intensely, that it amounts to simple

egoism and makes it hard for her and me, and that as time goes on it will be even harder for me. Why, it's quite true, you know, and he spoke from love of me, and it doesn't at all follow that he meant anything offensive to Natasha; on the contrary, he saw the strength of her love, love without measure, almost unendurable love."

But Katya interrupted him and would not let him finish. She began upbraiding him hotly and proving to him that the prince had only praised Natasha to deceive him by a show of kindness, all in order to destroy their attachment, with the idea of invisibly and imperceptibly turning Alyosha against her. Warmly and cleverly she argued that Natasha loved him, that no love could forgive the way he was treating her, and that the real egoist was Alyosha himself. Little by little Katya reduced him to dreadful misery and complete penitence. He sat beside us, utterly crushed, staring at the floor with a look of suffering on his face and no longer attempting to answer. But Katya was relentless. I kept looking at her with the greatest interest. I was eager to get to know this strange girl. She was quite a child, but a strange child, a child of convictions, with steadfast principles, and with a passionate, innate love of goodness and justice. If one really might call her a child she belonged to that class of *thinking* children, who are fairly numerous in our Russian families. It was evident that she had pondered much. It would have been curious to peep into that little pondering head and to see the mixture of quite childish ideas and conceptions, with serious impressions and observations gained from experience of life (for Katya already knew something of life), and at the same time with ideas of which she had no real knowledge or experience, abstract theories she had got out of books, though she probably mistook them for generalizations gained by her own experience. These abstract ideas must have been very numerous. In the course of that evening and on sub-

sequent occasions I studied her, I believe, pretty thoroughly. Her heart was ardent and receptive. In some cases she, as it were, disdained self-control, putting genuineness before everything, and looking upon every restraint in life as a conventional prejudice. And she seemed to pride herself on that conviction, which is often the case with persons of ardent temperament even in those who are not very young. But it was just this that gave her a peculiar charm. She was very fond of thinking and getting at the truth of things, but was so far from being pedantic, so full of youthful, childish pranks, that from the first moment you began to love all these peculiarities in her, and to accept them.

I thought of Lyovinka and Borinka, and it seemed to me that that was all in the natural order of things. And strange to say, her face, in which I had seen nothing particularly beautiful at first sight, seemed that very evening to grow lovelier and more attractive every minute. This naive combination of the child and the thinking woman, this childlike and absolutely genuine thirst for truth and justice and absolute faith in her impulses—all this lighted up her face with a fine glow of sincerity, giving it a lofty, spiritual beauty, and you began to understand that it was not so easy to gauge the full significance of that beauty which was not all at once apparent to every ordinary, indifferent eye. And I realized that Alyosha was bound to become passionately attached to her. If he was incapable of thought and reasoning himself he was especially attracted by those who could do his thinking, and even wishing, for him, and Katya had already taken him under her wing. His heart was generous, and it instantly surrendered without a struggle to everything that was fine and honourable, and Katya had already spoken to him of many things with sympathy and all the sincerity of a child. He was absolutely without a will of his own. She had a very great deal of strong,

insistent, and ardent will; and Alyosha would only attach himself to someone who could dominate and even command him. It was partly this which had appealed to him in Natasha at the beginning of their attachment, but Katya had a great advantage over Natasha in that she was still a child herself and seemed likely to remain so for a long time. This childishness, her bright intelligence, and at the same time a certain lack of judgement, all this made her more akin to Alyosha. He felt this, and so Katya attracted him more and more. I am certain that when they talked alone together, in the midst of Katya's earnest "indoctrination" they sometimes relapsed into quite childish amusements. And though Katya probably often chided Alyosha and already had him well under her thumb, he was evidently more at home with her than with Natasha. They were more suited to each other and that was the main thing.

"Stop, Katya, stop, enough; you always have the best of it, and I'm always wrong. That's because your heart is purer than mine," said Alyosha, getting up and giving her his hand at parting. "I'm going straight to her and I won't look in on Lyovinka either."

"There's nothing for you to do at Lyovinka's. But you're very sweet to obey and go now."

"And you're a thousand times sweeter than anybody," answered Alyosha sadly. "Ivan Petrovich, I've a word or two I want to say to you."

We moved a couple of paces away.

"I've behaved shamefully today," he whispered to me. "I've behaved vilely, I've sinned against everyone in the world, and these two more than all. After dinner today Father introduced me to Mlle. Alexandrine (she's French)—a charming woman. I . . . was carried away and . . . but what's the good of talking . . . I'm unworthy to be with them. . . . Good-bye, Ivan Petrovich!"

"He's kind, he's honourable," Katya began hurriedly,

when I had sat down beside her again, "but we'll talk a great deal about him later; first of all we must come to an understanding; what is your opinion of the prince?"

"He's a very bad man."

"I think so too. So we're agreed about that, and we shall be able to judge better. Now, of Natalya Nikolaevna. . . . Do you know, Ivan Petrovich, I am still, as it were, in the dark, I've been looking forward to you to bring me light. You must make it all clear to me, for about many of the chief points I can judge only by guesswork from what Alyosha tells me. There was no one else from whom I could learn anything. Tell me then, in the first place (this is the chief point) what do you think: will Alyosha and Natasha be happy together or not? That's what I must know before everything else that I may make up my mind once and for all how I must act."

"How can one tell that with any certainty?"

"No, of course, not with certainty," she interrupted, "but what do you think, for you are a very clever man?"

"I think that they can't be happy."

"Why?"

"They're not suited."

"That's just what I thought!" And she clasped her hands as though deeply distressed.

"Tell me more fully. Listen, I'm awfully anxious to see Natasha, for there's a great deal I must talk over with her, and it seems to me that she and I can settle everything together. I keep picturing her to myself now: she must be very clever, serious, truthful and beautiful. Isn't she?"

"Yes."

"I was sure of it. Well, if she is like that how could she fall in love with Alyosha, a mere boy? Explain that to me, I often wonder about it."

"That can't be explained, Katerina Fyodorovna. It's difficult to imagine how and why one falls in love. Yes,

he's a child. But do you know how one may love a child?" (My heart melted as I looked at her and at her eyes fastened upon me with profound, earnest and impatient attention). "And the less Natasha herself is like a child, the more serious she is, the more readily she might fall in love with him. He's truthful, sincere, awfully naive, and sometimes charmingly naive! Perhaps she fell in love with him—how shall I express it?—as it were from compassion. A generous heart may love from compassion. I feel, though, that I can't explain it to you, and I'll ask you instead: you do love him, don't you?"

I boldly asked her this question and felt that I could not disturb the infinite childlike purity of her candid soul by the abruptness of such a question.

"I honestly don't know yet," she answered me quietly, looking serenely in my eyes, "but I think I love him very much. . . ."

"There, you see. And can you explain why you love him?"

"There's no falsehood in him," she answered after thinking a moment, "and when he looks right into my eyes and says something, I like it very much. Tell me, Ivan Petrovich, here I'm talking about this to you, I'm a girl and you're a man, am I doing right in this, or not?"

"Why, what is there in it?"

"Nothing. Of course there's nothing in it. But they," she glanced at the group sitting round the samovar, "they would certainly say it was wrong. Are they right or not?"

"No. Why, you don't feel in your heart you're doing wrong, so. . . ."

"That's what I always do," she broke in, evidently in haste to get in as much talk with me as she could. "When I'm confused about anything I always look into my own heart, and if it's at ease then I'm at ease. That's what one should always do. And I speak as frankly to you as I

would speak to myself because for one thing you are a splendid man and I know all about you and Natasha, before Alyosha's time, and I cried when I heard about it."

"Why, who told you?"

"Alyosha, of course, and he had tears in his eyes when he told me. That was very sweet of him, and I liked him for it, I think he likes you better than you like him, Ivan Petrovich. It's just such things I like him for. And another reason why I am as open with you as I am with myself is that you're a very clever man, and you can give me advice and teach me about a great many things."

"How do you know that I'm clever enough to teach you?"

"Oh, well, how can you ask!"

She grew thoughtful.

"I didn't mean to talk about that really. Let's talk of what matters most. Tell me, Ivan Petrovich; here I feel now that I'm Natasha's rival, I know I am, so how am I to act? That's why I asked you whether they would be happy. I think about it day and night. Natasha's position is awful, awful! He has quite ceased loving her, you know, and he loves me more and more. That is so, isn't it?"

"It seems so."

"Yes. He is not deceiving her. He doesn't know that he is ceasing to love her, but she probably knows it. How miserable she must be!"

"What do you mean to do, Katerina Fyodorovna?"

"I have a great many plans," she answered seriously, "and yet I'm all in a muddle. That's why I've been so impatient to see you so that you would make it all clear to me. You know all that so much better than I do. You're a sort of oracle to me now, you know. Listen, this is how I reasoned at first: if they love one another they must be happy, and so I ought to sacrifice myself and help them—oughtn't I?"

"I know you did sacrifice yourself."

"Yes, I did. But afterwards when he began coming here and growing more and more attached to me, I began to hesitate, and I'm still hesitating whether I ought to sacrifice myself or not. That's very wrong of me, isn't it?"

"That's natural," I answered, "that's how it should be . . . and it's not your fault."

"I think it is. You say that because you are very kind. And I think that my heart is not quite pure. If I had a pure heart I should know what to decide. But let us leave that. Afterwards I heard more about their relations from the prince, from *Maman*, from Alyosha himself, and guessed they were not suited, and now you've confirmed it. I was puzzled more than ever; what now? If they're going to be unhappy, why, they had better part. And so I made up my mind to ask you more fully about it, and to call on Natasha myself, and to settle it all with her."

"But settle it how? That's the question."

"I shall simply say to her, 'you love him more than anything, don't you, and so you must care more for his happiness than your own, and therefore you must part with him.'"

"Yes, but how will that make her feel? And even if she does agree with you, will she be strong enough to act on it?"

"That's what I think about day and night, and . . . and . . ."

And she suddenly burst into tears.

"You don't know how sorry I am for Natasha," she whispered, her lips quivering with tears.

There was nothing more to be said. I was silent, and I too felt inclined to cry as I watched her, for no particular reason, from a vague feeling like tenderness. What a charming child she was! I no longer felt it necessary to ask her why she thought she could make Alyosha happy.

"You are fond of music, aren't you?" she asked, growing a little calmer, still pensive from her recent tears.

"Yes," I answered, with some surprise.

"If there was time I'd play you Beethoven's third concerto. That's what I'm playing now. All those feelings are in it . . . just as I feel now. So it seems to me. But that must be another time, now we must talk."

We began discussing how she could meet Natasha, and how it was all to be arranged. She told me that they kept a watch on her, and though her stepmother was kind and fond of her, she would never allow her to meet Natalya Nikolayevna, and so she had decided to use subterfuge. She sometimes went for a drive in the morning, but almost invariably with the countess. Sometimes the countess didn't go with her but sent her out alone with the Frenchwoman, who was ill just now. This happened when the countess had a headache, and so she would have to wait until she had one. And meanwhile she would talk her Frenchwoman into it (an old lady who was some sort of companion), for the latter was very pliant. The upshot of it was that it was impossible to fix beforehand what day she would be able to visit Natasha.

"You won't regret making Natasha's acquaintance," I said. "She is very anxious to know you too, and she must, if only to know who she is handing Alyosha to. Don't worry too much about it all. Time will settle everything, without your troubling. You are going to the country, aren't you?"

"Quite soon, in another month perhaps," she answered. "And I know the prince is insisting on it."

"What do you think—will Alyosha go with you?"

"I've thought about that," she said, looking intently at me. "He will, you know."

"Yes, he will."

"Good heavens, how it will all end I don't know. I tell you what, Ivan Petrovich, I'll write to you about every-

thing, I'll write to you often, fully. Now I've started pestering you. Will you come and see us often?"

"I don't know, Katerina Fyodorovna. That depends upon circumstances. Perhaps I may not come at all."

"Why not?"

"It will depend on several considerations, and chiefly what terms I am on with the prince."

"He's not an honest man," said Katya with decision. "But, I say, Ivan Petrovich, what if I should come to see you? Will that be right or wrong of me?"

"What do you think yourself?"

"I think it would be right. Just to see how you are..." she added with a smile. "And I'm saying this because I like you very much as well as respect you. And I could learn a great deal from you. And I like you.... And I needn't be ashamed of speaking about it, need I?"

"Why should you be? You're as dear to me already as one of my own family."

"Then you want to be my friend?"

"Oh yes, yes!" I answered.

"And they would certainly say it was not proper and that a young girl ought not to behave like this," she observed, again indicating the group in conversation at the tea-table.

I may mention here that the prince had evidently left us alone intentionally so that we might talk to our heart's content.

"I know very well," she added, "that the prince wants my money. They think I'm a perfect child, and in fact they tell me so openly. But I don't think so. I'm not a child any more. They're strange people; they're like children themselves. What are they in such a fuss about?"

"Katerina Fyodorovna, I forgot to ask you, who are these Lyovinka and Borinka whom Alyosha goes to see so often?"

"They're my distant relations. They're very clever and very honest, but they do such a dreadful lot of talking. I know them...."

And she smiled.

"Is it true that you mean to give them a million when you come into your money?"

"Now you see, take that million for example. They chatter so much about it that it's growing quite unbearable. Of course I shall be delighted to contribute to everything useful; what's the good of such an immense fortune? But it'll be a long time before I can do that, and they're already dividing it, discussing it, shouting, disputing what's the best use to make of it, they even quarrel about it—it's really quite queer. They're in too great a hurry. But they're honest all the same and clever. They are studying. That's better anyway than going on as other people do. Isn't it?"

And we talked a great deal more. She told me almost her whole life, and listened eagerly to what I had to say. She kept insisting that I should tell her more about Natasha and Alyosha. It was already midnight when the prince came up to me and gave me to understand it was time to take leave. I said good-bye. Katya pressed my hand warmly and looked at me expressively. The countess asked me to come again; the prince and I went out together.

I cannot refrain from one strange and perhaps quite inappropriate remark. From my three hours' conversation with Katya I carried away among other impressions the strange but deep conviction that she was still such a perfect child that she had no idea of the whole meaning of the relations of the sexes. This gave an extraordinarily comic flavour to some of her reasonings, and to her serious tone as a whole in which she talked of many very important matters.

CHAPTER X

"I have an idea," said the prince, as he seated himself beside me in the carriage, "what if we were to go and have some supper now, eh? What do you say to that?"

"I really don't know, prince," I answered hesitating. "I never take supper."

"Well, of course, we'll have a *talk* too, over supper," he added, looking intently and slyly into my face.

It was perfectly clear to me! "He means to speak out," I thought; "and that's just what I want." I agreed.

"That's settled then. To B.'s in Bolshaya Morskaya."

"A restaurant?" I asked, somewhat taken aback.

"Yes, why not? I don't often have supper at home. Surely you won't refuse to be my guest?"

"But I've told you already that I never take supper."

"But once in a while doesn't matter, and then it's I who am inviting you...."

Which meant he would pay for me. I am certain he added that intentionally. I allowed myself to be taken there, but made up my mind to pay for myself. We arrived. The prince engaged a private room, and with the taste of a connoisseur selected two or three dishes. They were expensive and so was the bottle of fine wine which he ordered. All this was beyond my means. I looked at the bill of fare and ordered half a woodcock and a glass of Lafitte. The prince protested at this.

"You won't sup with me! Why, this is positively ridiculous! Pardon, *mon ami*, but this is ... revolting punctiliousness. It's the paltriest vanity. There's a suspicion of class feeling about this, I bet that's what it is. I assure you you're offending me."

But I stuck to my point.

"However, please yourself," he added. "I'm not forcing you. Tell me, Ivan Petrovich, may I speak to you as a friend?"

"I beg you to do so."

"Well, then, I think such punctiliousness stands in your own way. All you writers harm yourselves in exactly the same way. You are a literary man; you ought to know the world, and you hold yourself aloof from everything. I'm not talking of your woodcock now, but you are ready to refuse to associate with our circle altogether, and that's definitely against your interests. Apart from the fact that you lose a great deal . . . well, I mean a career, in fact, apart from that, if only to know what you're describing, and in those novels of yours you have counts and princes and boudoirs. . . . But what am I saying! Poverty is all the fashion with you now, lost coats,* inspectors, quarrelsome officers, clerks, old times, dissenters, I know, I know. . . ."

"But you are mistaken, prince. If I don't frequent your so-called 'higher circle,' it's because in the first place it's boring, and in the second I've nothing to do there; though, after all, I do go sometimes."

"I know; to Prince R.'s, once a year; that's where I first met you. But for the rest of the year you stagnate in your democratic pride, and languish in your garrets, though not all of you behave like that. Some are such adventurers that even I feel nauseated."

"I beg you, prince, to change the subject and not to return to our garrets."

"Dear me, now you're offended. But you know you gave me permission to speak to you as a friend. But, I beg your pardon, I have done nothing yet to merit your friendship. The wine's very decent. Try it."

He poured me out half a glass from his bottle.

"You see, my dear Ivan Petrovich, I quite understand that to force one's friendship upon anyone is bad manners. We're not all so rude and insolent with you as

* Reference to Gogol's story "The Lost Greatcoat."—*Tr.*

you imagine. I quite understand, too, that you are not sitting here from any affection for me, but simply because I promised to *talk* to you. Isn't that true?"

He laughed.

"And as you're watching over the interests of a certain person you want to hear what I am going to say. That's it, isn't it?" he added with a malicious smile.

"You are not mistaken," I broke in impatiently. (I saw that he was one of those men who seeing that they had another in their power, however slightly, cannot resist making him feel it. And I was in his power. I could not go away without hearing all he intended to say, and he knew that very well. His tone suddenly changed and became more and more insolently familiar and sneering.) "You're not mistaken, prince, that's just what I've come for, otherwise I really should not be sitting here . . . so late."

I wanted to say: "I would not on any account have stayed with you," but I didn't say this, and finished my phrase differently, not from timidity, but from my cursed weakness and delicacy. And really, how can one be rude to a man to his face, even if he deserves it, and even though I had meant to be rude to him? I think the prince detected this from my eyes, and looked at me mockingly while I spoke, as though enjoying my faint-heartedness, and as it were challenging me: "So you don't dare, you've bungled it; that's right, my boy!" This must have been so, for as I finished he chuckled, and gave me a patronizing sort of slap on the knee.

"You make me laugh, my boy!" was what I read in his eyes. "Just you wait!" I thought to myself.

"I feel very gay tonight!" said he, "and I really don't know why. Yes, yes, my boy! It was just that young person I wanted to talk to you about. We must have it all out, come to a final decision, and I hope that this time you will understand me thoroughly. I started telling you about that money and that old fogey of a father, that

babe of sixty summers. . . . Well! It's not worth mentioning now. That was only talk, you know! Ha-ha-ha! You're a literary man, you ought to have guessed that."

I looked at him with amazement. He couldn't have been drunk already.

"As for that girl, I respect her, I assure you; I like her in fact. She's a little capricious but 'there's no rose without a thorn,' as they used to say fifty years ago, and it was well said too: thorns prick, but that's the most thrilling part of it and though my Alexei's a fool, I've forgiven him to some extent already for his good taste. In short, I like such young ladies, and I have" (and he compressed his lips with immense significance) "plans of my own, in fact. . . . But of that later. . . ."

"Prince! Listen, prince!" I cried. "I don't understand your quick change of front but . . . change the subject, if you please."

"Here you're getting angry again! Very good . . . I'll change it, I'll change it! But I'll tell you what I want to ask you, my good friend: have you a very great respect for her?"

"Of course," I answered, with gruff impatience.

"And . . . and do you love her?" he continued, grinning revoltingly and screwing up his eyes.

"You are forgetting yourself!" I cried.

"There, there, I won't! Don't be so touchy! I'm in the most wonderful spirits today. I haven't felt so gay for a long time. Shall we have some champagne? What do you say, my poet?"

"I won't drink. I don't want to."

"I won't take 'no' for an answer! You really must keep me company tonight. I am feeling fine and as I'm kind-hearted to the point of sentimentality, I can't bear to be happy alone. Who knows, we may yet come to drinking '*bruderschaft*.' Ha-ha-ha! No, my young friend, you don't know me yet! I'm certain you'll grow to love me.

I want you this evening to share my grief and my joy, my tears and my laughter, though I hope that I, at least, may not weep. Come, what do you say, Ivan Petrovich? You see, you must consider that if I don't get what I want, all my inspiration may pass, be wasted and take wing and you'll hear nothing. And you know you're only sitting here in the hope of hearing something. Aren't you?" he added, winking at me insolently again. "So, make your choice."

The threat was a serious one. I consented. "Surely he doesn't want to make me drunk?" I thought. By the way, it's appropriate to mention here a rumour about the prince which had reached me long before. It was said that though he was always so refined and decorous in society he was fond of occasional drinking orgies, of drinking himself insensible, of indulging in secret lust, of loathsome and mysterious lewdness. I had heard terrible rumours about him. It was said that Alyosha knew his father sometimes drank, and tried to conceal the fact from everyone, especially from Natasha. Once he let something slip before me, but immediately changed the subject and would not answer my questions. However, it was not Alyosha I had heard it from, and I must admit I had not believed it. But now I waited to see what was coming.

The champagne was brought, the prince poured out a glass for himself and another for me.

"A sweet, sweet girl, though she did scold me," he went on, sipping his wine with relish, "but these sweet creatures are particularly sweet just at moments like those. And, you know, she probably thought she had put me to shame that evening, remember? crushed me to atoms! Ha-ha-ha! And how a blush suits her! Are you a connoisseur in women? Sometimes a sudden flush is ~~wonderfully~~ becoming to a pale cheek, have you noticed that? Oh dear, I believe you're angry again!"

"Yes, I am!" I cried, unable to restrain myself. "And I won't have you speak of Natalya Nikolayevna . . . that is, speak in that tone. . . . I . . . I won't allow you to do it!"

"You won't! Well, as you like. I'll humour you and change the conversation. I am as yielding and soft as dough. Let's talk of you. I like you, Ivan Petrovich. If only you knew what a friendly, what a sincere interest I take in you."

"Prince, wouldn't it be better to keep to the point," I interrupted.

"You mean talk of *our little business*. I understand you with half a word, *mon ami*, but you cannot imagine how closely we shall touch on the point if we speak of you now and you don't interrupt me of course. And so, to continue: I wanted to tell you, my priceless Ivan Petrovich, that to live as you're living is simply self-destruction. Allow me to touch on this delicate subject; I speak as a friend. You are poor, you ask your publisher for an advance, you pay your trifling debts, with what's left you live for six months on tea, and shiver in your garret while you're writing your novel for your publisher's magazine. It is so, isn't it?"

"If it is so, anyway it's. . . ."

"More creditable than stealing, cringing, taking bribes, intriguing and so on, and so on. I know, I know what you want to say, all that's been written about long ago."

"And so there's no need for you to talk about my affairs. Surely, prince, I needn't give you a lesson in tact!"

"Well, certainly not you. But what's to be done if it's just that delicate chord we must touch? There's no avoiding it. But there, let's leave garrets alone. I'm by no means fond of them myself, except in certain cases," he added with a loathsome laugh. "But what surprises me is this: why do you want to play a secondary part? Cer-

tainly one of your authors, I seem to remember, said somewhere that perhaps the greatest feat man can achieve is to restrict himself to a secondary role in life. . . . I believe it's something of that sort. I've heard talk of that somewhere too, but you know Alyosha has carried off your fiancée. I know that and you, like some Schiller, are working yourself to the bone for them, you're waiting upon them, are almost at their beck and call. . . . You must excuse me, my dear fellow, but it's rather an unsavoury little affectation of noble feeling. I should have thought you must be sick of it! It's really shameful! I believe I should die of vexation in your place and worst of all of shame, of the shame of it!"

"Prince, you seem to have brought me here for the sole purpose of insulting me!" I cried, beside myself with anger.

"Oh no, my friend, not at all. At this moment I am simply a matter-of-fact person, and I desire your happiness. In fact I want to put everything right. But let's lay everything aside for a moment: hear me to the end, try not to lose your temper if only for two minutes. Now, what do you think, how would it be for you to get married? You see, I'm talking of quite *extraneous* matters now. Why do you look at me in such astonishment?"

"I'm waiting for you to finish," I said, staring at him indeed with astonishment.

"But there's no need to enlarge. I simply wanted to know what you'd say if one of your friends, anxious to secure your genuine permanent welfare, not a mere ephemeral happiness, were to offer you a girl, young and pretty, but . . . one who's had a bit of experience; I speak allegorically but you'll understand, someone like Natalya Nikolayevna, with a suitable compensation of course (observe I am speaking of an irrelevant case, not of *our* affair); well, what would you say?"

"I'll say to you that you're . . . mad."

“Ha-ha-ha! Dear me, you look as if you’re going to hit me!”

I actually was near falling upon him. I could not restrain myself longer. He produced on me the impression of some loathsome creature, some huge spider which I felt an intense desire to crush. He was enjoying his taunts at me. He was playing with me like a cat with a mouse, supposing that I was altogether in his power. It seemed to me (and I understood it) that he took a certain pleasure, perhaps even found a sensual gratification in the shamelessness, in the insolence, in the cynicism with which he was at last throwing off his mask before me. He wanted to enjoy my surprise, my horror. He had a genuine contempt for me and was laughing at me.

I had a foreboding from the very beginning that this was all premeditated, and that there was some motive behind it, but I was in such a position that whatever happened I was bound to hear him out. It was in Natasha’s interests, and I was obliged to take whatever was coming and endure everything, for perhaps the whole affair was being settled at that moment. But how could I listen to his base, cynical jeers at her expense, how could I endure this coolly! And, to make things worse, he quite realized that I could not avoid listening to him, and this redoubled the offensiveness of it. “Yet he needs me himself,” I reflected, and I began answering him abruptly and rudely. He understood it.

“Look here, my young friend,” he began, looking at me seriously, “we can’t go on like this, and so we’d better come to an understanding. I have been intending, you see, to speak openly to you about something, and you should be so obliging as to listen, whatever I may say. I wish to speak as I choose and as I prefer; and, really, that’s how it should be. Well then, my young friend, will you be patient?”

I controlled myself and made no reply, although he was looking at me with such biting mockery, as though he were challenging me to the most outspoken protest. But he realized that I had already agreed not to leave and went on.

"Don't be angry with me, my friend! After all, what was it that angered you? It was only my plain speaking, wasn't it? But as a matter of fact you did not expect anything else of me, did you, however I might have spoken to you: with flowery courtesy, or as I'm doing now; so the drift would have been the same in any case. You despise me, don't you? You see how much charming simplicity there is in me, what candour, what *bonhomie*! I confess everything to you, even my childish whims. Yes, *mon cher*, yes, a little more *bonhomie* on your side, too, and we should agree and get on famously, and understand one another perfectly in the end. And do not wonder at me! I am so sick of all this innocence, all these pastoral idyllics of Alyosha's, all this Schillerism, all the loftiness of this damnable intrigue with this Natasha (not that she's not a very sweet little girl) that I am, so to speak, glad of an opportunity to have my fling at them. Well, the opportunity has come. Besides, I am longing to pour out my heart to you. Ha! ha! ha!"

"You surprise me, prince, and I hardly recognize you. You are falling into the tone of a Polichinelle. These unexpected revelations...."

"Ha! ha! ha! to be sure that's partly true! A charming comparison, ha-ha-ha! I'm out on a spree, my boy, I'm out on a spree! I'm enjoying myself! And you, my poet, must show me every possible indulgence. But we'd better drink," he concluded filling up his glass, perfectly satisfied with himself. "D'you know, my friend, that stupid evening at Natasha's, do you remember, was in itself sufficient to finish me off completely. It's true she herself was very charming, but I came away feeling

horribly angry, and I don't want to forget it. Neither to forget it nor to conceal it. Of course our time will come too, and it's coming quickly indeed, but we'll leave that for now. And among other things I wanted to explain to you that I have one peculiarity of which you are not yet aware—it's my hatred for all these trite and worthless naïvetés and idyllic nonsense; and one of the most piquant delights for me has always been to put on that style myself, fall in with that tone, encouraging and making much of some ever-young Schiller and then, suddenly, all at once to crush him at one blow by suddenly taking off my mask before him, distorting my ecstatic countenance into a grimace, and putting out my tongue at him when he is least expecting such a surprise. What? You don't appreciate it, you think it nasty, ridiculous, dishonourable perhaps, is that it?"

"Of course it is."

"You are frank, I dare say, but what am I to do if they plague me? I'm stupidly frank too, but such is my character. I want to tell you some characteristic incidents in my life. It will make you understand me better, and it will be very curious. Yes, I really am perhaps, like a Polichinelle today, but a Polichinelle is frank, isn't he?"

"Look here, prince, it's late now, and really...."

"What? Good heavens, what intolerance! Besides, what's the hurry? Let us sit over a glass of wine and have a friendly heart-to-heart talk, like good old friends, you know. You think I'm drunk. Never mind, so much the better. Ha-ha-ha! These evenings with friends are always remembered so long afterwards, you know, one recalls them with such enjoyment. You're unkind, Ivan Petrovich. There's no sentimentality, no feeling about you. What is a paltry hour or two to you for the sake of a good friend like me? Besides, it has a bearing on a certain affair.... Don't you see? And you a literary man too; why, you ought to bless the chance. You might create

a type from me, ha-ha-ha! Good God, how sweetly candid I am today!"

He was evidently becoming tipsy. His face changed and assumed a spiteful expression. He was obviously longing to wound, to sting, to bite, to jeer. "In a way it's better he's drunk," I thought, "drunken men are always indiscreet." But he knew what he was about.

"My friend," he began, unmistakably enjoying himself, "I made you a confession just now, perhaps an inappropriate one, that I sometimes have an irresistible desire to put out my tongue at people in certain cases. For this naive and simple-hearted frankness you compared me to Polichinelle, which I really find very funny. But if you wonder at me or reproach me for being rude to you now, and perhaps as unmannerly as a clod, in fact for having changed my tone to you, in that case you are quite unjust. In the first place it happens to suit me, and secondly, I am not at home, but out *with you* . . . by which I mean we're out on a *spree* together like good pals, and thirdly, I'm awfully given to acting on my fancies. Do you know that once I had a fancy to become a metaphysician and a philanthropist, and I was full of practically the same ideas as you? But that was ages ago, in the golden days of my youth. I remember at that time I went to my country estate with humane intentions, and was, of course, bored to extinction. And you wouldn't believe what happened to me then. In my boredom I began to make the acquaintance of some pretty little girls. . . . What, you're not making faces already? Oh, my young friend! Why, we're talking as friends now! Isn't it the time to enjoy oneself, to let oneself go! I have the Russian temperament, you know, a truly Russian temperament, I'm a patriot, I love to let myself go: besides one must snatch the moment and enjoy life. We shall die—and what comes then! Well, so I took to dangling after the girls. I remember one little shepherdess had a hus-

band, a handsome young peasant. I had him soundly chastised and meant to send him for a soldier (past naughtiness, my poet), but I didn't send him for a soldier. He died in my hospital. I had a hospital in the village, you know, with twelve beds—splendidly fitted up, perfect cleanliness, parquet floors. I abolished it long ago though, but at that time I prided in it: I was a philanthropist, but I nearly flogged the peasant chap to death because of his wife . . . now why are you grimacing again? It disgusts you to hear about it? It revolts your noble feelings? There, there, don't upset yourself! All that's a thing of the past. I did that when I was in my romantic stage, when I wanted to be a benefactor of humanity, to found a philanthropic society. . . . That was the groove I was in at that time. It was then I went in for flogging. I wouldn't flog them now: now one has to grimace about it; now we all grimace about it—such are the times. . . . But what amuses me most of all now is that fool Ikhmenev. I'm convinced that he knew all about that episode with the peasant chap . . . and what do you think? In the goodness of his heart, which is made of treacle, I believe, and because he fell in love with me at that time, and overpraised me to himself, he made up his mind not to believe a word of it, and he didn't believe a word of it; that is, he refused to believe in what was a fact and for twelve years he stood firm as a rock for me, till he himself was affected. Ha-ha-ha! But all that's bosh! Let us drink, my young friend. Listen: are you fond of women?"

I said nothing. I only listened to him. He was already beginning on the second bottle.

"And I love to talk about them over supper. I could introduce you after supper to a Mlle. Philiberte. Eh? What do you say? But what is the matter? You won't even look at me . . . hm!"

He seemed to ponder. But he suddenly raised his head, glanced at me significantly, and went on:

"Now then, my poet, I want to reveal to you a mystery of nature of which it seems you are not in the least aware. I'm certain that at this moment you are calling me a sinner, perhaps even a scoundrel, a monster of vice and corruption. But I'll tell you this: if it were only possible (which, however, from the laws of human nature never can be possible), if it were possible for everyone of us to describe all his secret thoughts, without hesitating to disclose what he is afraid to tell and would not on any account tell others, what he is afraid to tell his best friends, and what he is even at times afraid to confess to himself, the world would be filled with such a stench that we should all be suffocated. That's why, I may observe in parenthesis, our social proprieties and conventions are so good. There's a profound value in them, I won't say it was meant for morality, but simply for self-preservation, for comfort, which, of course, is even better, since morality is really that same comfort, that is, it's invented simply for the sake of comfort. But we'll talk of the proprieties presently. I'm wandering from the point, remind me later. I will conclude by saying this: you charge me with vice, corruption, immorality, but perhaps I am only guilty of being more open than others, that's all; of not concealing what others hide even from themselves, as I said before. . . . It's bad of me but it's what I want to do just now. But don't worry," he added with a smile of mockery, "I said 'guilty' but I'm not asking forgiveness at all. Note this too: I'm not making it awkward for you. I'm not asking you whether you have any such secrets yourself, in order to find justification for myself in your admissions. I am behaving decently and honourably. I always behave like a gentleman. . . ."

"You're simply raving," I said, looking at him with contempt.

"Raving, am I? Ha-ha-ha! Shall I tell you what you're thinking now? You're wondering why I brought you here, and am suddenly, without rhyme or reason, revealing my soul to you. Isn't that it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that you will learn later."

"The simplest explanation is that you've almost finished two bottles and ... are not sober."

"You mean I'm simply drunk. That may be, too. 'Not sober!' That's a milder way of putting it than drunk. Oh, man, brimming over with tact! But ... we seem to have begun abusing one another again, and we were talking of something so interesting. Yes, my poet, if there is anything sweet and pretty left in the world it's women."

"Do you know, prince, I still can't understand why you have selected me as a confidant of your secrets and your amorous ... aspirations."

"Hm! But I told you that you'd learn that later on. Don't let it worry you; but perhaps I had no reason; you're a poet, you'll understand me, but I've told you that already. There's a peculiar gratification in the sudden throwing off of the mask, in the cynicism with which a man suddenly exposes himself before another without even deigning to consider decency in his presence. I'll tell you an anecdote. There was a crazy official in Paris, who was afterwards put into a madhouse when they made sure that he was mad. Well, when he started going out of his mind this is what he thought of to amuse himself. He undressed at home, completely, like Adam, only keeping on his shoes and socks, put on an ample cloak that came down to his heels, wrapped himself round in it, and with a grave and majestic mien went out into the street. Well, at a glance—he's a man like anyone else, taking a pleasure stroll in a long cloak. But whenever he met anyone in a lonely place where there was no one else about, he walked up to him in silence, with the most

serious and profoundly thoughtful air and suddenly stopped before him, threw open his cloak and displayed himself in all the . . . nakedness of his soul! It only lasted a minute, then he would wrap himself up again, and in silence, without moving a muscle of his face, he would stalk by the petrified spectator, as grave and majestic as the ghost in *Hamlet*. He behaved like that with anyone, men, women, and children alike, and that was his entire pleasure. Well, some degree of the same pleasure may be experienced when one flabbergasts some romantic Schiller, by putting out one's tongue at him when he least expects it. 'Flabbergast'—what a word! I met it somewhere in one of your modern writers!"

"Well, that was a madman, but you. . . ."

"Know what I'm about?"

"Yes."

The prince burst out laughing.

"You're right there, my boy!" he added, with a most insolent expression of face.

"Prince," I said, angered by his insolence, "you hate us all, including me, and you're revenging yourself on me for everyone and everything. It all comes from your petty vanity. You're spiteful, and petty in your spite. We have enraged you, and perhaps what you are most angry about is that evening. Of course, there's no way in which you could have paid me out more effectually than by this absolute contempt. You are even repudiating the most ordinary universally obligatory civility which we all owe to one another. You want to show me clearly that you flout all decency in my presence, by so openly and unexpectedly throwing off your filthy mask before me, and exhibiting yourself in such moral cynicism. . . ."

"Why are you saying all this to me?" he asked, eyeing me rudely and maliciously. "To show your insight?"

"To show that I understand you, and to put it plainly before you."

“*Quelle idée, mon cher,*” he went on, changing his tone and suddenly reverting to his former light-hearted, good-humoured chattiness. “You have simply thrown me off my subject. *Buvons, mon ami,* allow me to fill your glass. And I was just going to tell you about a charming and most curious adventure. I will tell it briefly. Once upon a time I knew a lady; she was not in her first youth, but about twenty-seven or eight. She was a beauty of the first rank—what a bust, what a figure, what a carriage! Her eyes were as keen as an eagle’s, but always stern and forbidding; her manner was majestic and unapproachable. She was reputed to be as cold as the driven snow, and frightened everyone by her unapproachable, her menacing virtue. Menacing’s the word. There was no one in her circle so intolerant in judgement as she. She punished not only vice, but even the faintest weakness in other women, and punished it relentlessly, without repeal. She had great influence in her circle. The proudest old women, the most terrifying in their virtue—respected her and even made up to her. She looked upon everyone with impartial cruelty, like the abbess of a medieval convent. Young women trembled before her glances and her criticism. A single remark, a single hint from her could ruin a reputation,—such was the position she had built for herself in society—even men were afraid of her. Finally she plunged into a sort of contemplative mysticism, which was, however, equally cool and dignified. . . . And would you believe it? You couldn’t have found a libertine more profligate than she was, and I had the good fortune to gain her complete confidence. In other words I was her secret and mysterious lover. Our meetings were arranged in such a clever, masterly fashion, that no one even of her own household could have had the slightest suspicion of them. Only her maid, a very pretty French girl, was initiated into all her secrets, but one could rely on that girl absolutely. She had her share

in the proceedings—in what way?—I won't enter into that now. My lady's sensuality was such that even the Marquis de Sade might have taken lessons from her. But the most intense, the most poignant thrill in this sensuality was its secrecy, the audacity of the deception. This jeering at everything which in public the countess preached as being lofty, transcendent and inviolable, and then this diabolic inward laughter, and conscious trampling on everything held sacred—and all this without bounds, carried to the utmost pitch of licentiousness such as even the most feverish imagination dare scarcely conceive—in that, above all, lay the keenness of the pleasure. Yes, she was the devil incarnate, but it was a devil supremely fascinating. Even now I recall her with rapture. In the heat of the most fiery ecstasy she would suddenly laugh like one possessed, and I understood it thoroughly, I understood that laughter and laughed too. It catches my breath now when I think of it, although it's many years since. She discarded me after a year. If I had wanted to injure her I couldn't have. Who would have believed me? What a character, eh? Well, my young friend?"

"Ugh, how disgusting!" I answered, having listened to this avowal with repulsion.

"You wouldn't have been my young friend, if your answer were different. I knew you'd say that. Ha-ha-ha! Wait a bit, *mon ami*, when you've lived a little longer you'll understand, but now, now you still need gilt on your gingerbread. No, you're not a poet if that's what you say. That woman understood life and knew how to make the most of it."

"But why sink to such beastliness?"

"What beastliness?"

"To which that woman sank, and you with her."

"Ah, you call it beastliness—it's a sign that you are still in bonds and leading strings. Of course, I recognize

that independence may express itself in quite an opposite direction too. Let's talk more plainly, my friend . . . you must admit yourself that all that's nonsense."

"What isn't nonsense then?"

"Personality, I, myself—that isn't nonsense. All is for me, the whole world is created for me. Listen, my friend, I still believe that it's possible to live happily on earth. And that's the best faith, for without it one can't even live unhappily: there's nothing left but to poison oneself. They say that this was what some fool did. He philosophized till he destroyed everything, everything, even the lawfulness of all normal and natural human duties, till at last he had nothing left. The sum total came to nil, and so he declared that the best thing in life was prussic acid. You'll say that's Hamlet, that's wrathful despair, in fact, something so grand that we would never dream of it. But you're a poet, and I'm a simple mortal, and therefore I will say one must look at things from the simplest, most practical point of view. I, for one, have long since freed myself from all shackles, and even obligations. I only recognize obligations when I see I have something to gain by them. You, of course, can't look at things like that, your legs are in fetters, and your taste is morbid. You yearn for the ideal, for virtue. But, my dear friend, I am ready to recognize anything you tell me to, but what shall I do if I know for a fact that at the root of all human virtues lies the most intense egoism? And the more virtuous a thing is, the more egoism there is in it. Love yourself, that's the one rule I recognize. Life is a commercial transaction, don't waste your money, but kindly pay for your entertainment, and you will be doing your whole duty to your neighbour. These are my morals, if you really want to know them, though I confess that to my thinking it is better not to pay one's neighbour, but to try and make him do things for nothing. I have no ideals and I don't want to have them; I've never felt a

need for them. One can live such a gay and charming life without ideals . . . and, *en somme*, I'm very glad that I can manage without prussic acid. If I were a little more *virtuous* I could not perhaps have managed without it, like that fool philosopher (a German, no doubt). No! There's still so much that's good in life! I love consequence, rank, a mansion, a huge stake at cards (I'm awfully fond of cards). But best of all, best of all—women . . . women of all kinds. I'm even fond of hidden, secretive vice, the more strange and original, the better, even tinged with filth for variety, ha-ha-ha! I can see from your face what contempt you have for me now!"

"You are right," I answered.

"Well, supposing you are right, too, anyway a tinge of filth is better than prussic acid, isn't it?"

"Oh no. Prussic acid is better!"

"I asked you 'isn't it' on purpose to enjoy your answer; I knew what you'd say. No, my young friend. If you're a genuine lover of humanity then wish all the sensible men to have the same taste as mine, even with a tinge of filth, for otherwise there will be no place left for the sensible men in the world and there'll be none but the fools left. Won't they be lucky! Though, indeed, there's a proverb even now that fools are born lucky. And do you know there's nothing pleasanter than living with fools and backing them up: it pays! Here you see me putting a great value on convention, keeping up certain traditions, struggling for influence; I see, of course, that I'm living in a worthless society; but meanwhile it's snug there and I back it up, and show I stand firm for it, though I'd be the first to leave it if occasion arose. I know all your modern ideas, though they've never affected me, not that there's anything in them to be affected by. Nothing has ever made me feel conscience-stricken. I'll agree to anything so long as I'm comfortable, and there are legions like me, and we really are comfortable. Every-

thing in the world may perish, we alone shall never perish. We have existed ever since the world exists. The whole universe may sink, but we shall float, we shall always float to the top. Consider, by the way, the very viability of people like us. We are pre-eminently, phenomenally tenacious of life; has that ever struck you? We live to be eighty, ninety. So nature itself protects us, ha-ha! I particularly want to live to be ninety. I wouldn't care to die, and I dread death. The devil only knows what sort of death awaits you. But why talk of that? It's that philosopher who poisoned himself that has put me on that track. Devil take philosophy! *Buvons, mon cher*. We began talking about pretty girls.... Where are you off to?"

"I'm going home, and it's time for you to go too."

"Nonsense, nonsense! I've, so to speak, opened my whole heart to you, and you don't even seem to feel what a great proof of friendship it is. He-he-he! There's not much love in you, my poet. But wait a minute, I want another bottle."

"A third?"

"Yes. As for virtue, my young hopeful (you will allow me to call you by that sweet name, won't you, who knows, maybe my precepts may come in useful one day). And so, my young hopeful, about virtue I have said already: the more virtuous virtue is, the more egoism there is in it. I should like to tell you a very pretty story apropos of that. I once loved a young girl, and loved her almost genuinely. She even sacrificed a great deal for me."

"Is that the one you robbed?" I asked rudely, unwilling to restrain myself longer.

The prince started, his face changed, and he fixed his bloodshot eyes on me. There was amazement and fury in them.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," he said as though to himself, "let me consider, I really am drunk, and it's difficult for me to put things together."

He paused, and looked at me searchingly, with the same spitefulness, placing his hand on mine as though afraid I should go away. I am convinced that at that moment he was going over things in his mind, trying to discover where I could have heard of this affair which scarcely anyone knew, and whether there were any danger threatening him in all this. This lasted for a minute; but suddenly his face changed quickly. The same mocking, drunkenly merry expression appeared in his eyes. He laughed.

"Ha-ha-ha! You're a regular Talleyrand, there's no other word for you. Why, I really stood before her like a rotter when she flung it in my face that I had robbed her! How she shrieked then, how she swore! She was a violent woman and with no self-control at all. But, judge for yourself: in the first place I hadn't robbed her as you expressed it just now. She gave me her money herself, and it was mine then. Suppose you were to give me your best dress-coat" (as he said this he glanced at my only and rather unshapely dress-coat which had been made for me three years ago by a tailor called Ivan Skornyagin), "I'm grateful to you, I wear it, and suddenly a year later you quarrel with me and ask for it back again, but in the meantime I've worn it out. That would be ungentlemanly; why give it at all? And, secondly, though the money was mine I should certainly have returned it, but think: where could I have got hold of such a sum all at once? And, above all, I can't stand all this Schillerism and idyllic nonsense: I've told you so already—well that was at the back of it all. You can't imagine how she posed for my benefit, screaming that she was making me a present of the money (which was mine already). Then I got angry

and was suddenly able to judge the position quite correctly, for I never lose my presence of mind; I reflected that by giving her back the money I should perhaps make her unhappy. I should have deprived her of the enjoyment of being miserable entirely *owing to me*, and of cursing me for it all her life. Believe me, my friend, there is positively a lofty ecstasy in unhappiness of that kind, in feeling oneself magnanimous and absolutely in the right, and in having every right to call one's offender a scoundrel. This ecstasy of spite one comes across in these Schilleresque people, of course; afterwards perhaps she may have had nothing to eat, but I am convinced that she was happy. And as I did not want to deprive her of that happiness, I did not send her back the money. And this fully justified my maxim that the louder and more conspicuous a person's magnanimity the greater the amount of the most revolting egoism in it. Surely that's clear to you. But . . . you wanted to trip me up, ha-ha-ha! Come, confess you were trying to trip me up. Oh, Talleyrand!"

"Good-bye," I said, getting up.

"One minute! Two words in conclusion!" he cried, suddenly dropping his disgusting tone and speaking seriously. "Listen to my last words; from all I have said to you it follows clearly and unmistakably (I imagine you have observed it yourself) that I shall never forego my interests for anyone, or anything. I love money and I need it. Katerina Fyodorovna has plenty. Her father held a contract for the vodka tax for ten years. She has three millions and these three millions will be very useful to me. Alyosha and Katya are a perfect match for one another; they are both utter fools; and that suits me perfectly. And, therefore, I desire and intend their marriage to take place, and as soon as possible, too. In a fortnight or three weeks the countess and Katya are going to the country. Alyosha must escort them. Warn Natalya Niko-

layevna that there had better be no idyllic nonsense, no Schillerism, that they had better not oppose me. I'm revengeful and resentful; I shall stand up for my own. I'm not afraid of her; everything will no doubt be as I wish it, and therefore if I warn her now it is really more for her own sake. Mind there's no silliness, and that she behaves herself sensibly. Otherwise she'll live to regret it, regret it sorely. As it is she ought to be grateful to me that I haven't applied the law to her. Do you know, my poet, that the law protects the peace of the family, it guarantees a son's obedience to his father, and that those who seduce children from their most sacred duties to their parents are not encouraged by the laws. Remember, too, that I have connections, while she has none, and . . . surely you must realize what I might have done to her. But I have not done it, because so far she has behaved reasonably. Rest assured that every moment for the last six months, every action of theirs has been watched by sharp eyes. And I have known everything to the smallest trifle. And so I have waited calmly for Alyosha to drop her of himself, and that process is now beginning; and meanwhile it has been a charming distraction for him. He continues to think of me as a humane father and I must have him think of me like that. Ha-ha-ha! When I remember that I was almost paying her compliments the other evening for having been so magnanimous and disinterested as not to marry him! I should like to know how she could have married him. As for my visit to her that night, it was simply because the time had come to put an end to the connection. But I wanted to verify everything with my own eyes, my own experience. Well, is that enough for you? Or perhaps you want to know too, why I brought you here, why I have carried on like this before you, why I have been so simple and frank with you, when all this might have been said without any such frank avowals—don't you?"

"Yes."

I controlled myself and listened eagerly. I had nothing else to say in answer.

"Solely, my friend, because I have noticed in you more common sense and clearsightedness about things than in either of our young fools. You might have known before the sort of man I am, might have made surmises and conjectures about me, but I wanted to save you the trouble, and resolved to show you face to face *who* it is you have to deal with. A first-hand impression is a great thing. Understand me, *mon ami*: you know whom you have to deal with, you love her, and so I hope now that you will use all your influence (and you have some influence over her) to save her from *certain* unpleasantness. Or else there will be unpleasantness and I assure you, I assure you it will be no joking matter. Finally, the third reason for my openness with you . . . (but of course you've guessed that, my dear) yes, I really did want to pour a little filth on the whole business and to do it before your eyes!"

"And you've attained your object," said I, quivering with indignation. "I agree that you could not have shown your malignancy and your contempt for me and for all of us better than by these frank avowals. Far from being apprehensive that your frankness might compromise you in *my* eyes, you were not even ashamed to expose yourself before me. You have certainly been like that madman in the cloak. You did not consider me a human being."

"You have guessed right, my young friend," he said, getting up, "you have seen through it all. You are not an author for nothing. I hope that we are parting amicably. We won't drink *bruderschaft* together, eh?"

"You are drunk, and that is the only reason that I don't answer you as you deserve."

"Again leaving things unsaid—you haven't finished how you should have answered me. Ha-ha-ha! You won't allow me to pay for you, will you?"

"Don't bother, I'll pay for myself."

"Ah, no doubt of it. Of course we're not going the same way?"

"I am not coming with you."

"Farewell, my poet. I hope you've understood me."

He went out, walking rather unsteadily, and not turning to me again. The footman helped him into his carriage. I went my way. It was after two in the morning. It was raining. The night was dark. . . .

PART FOUR



CHAPTER I

I shall not describe the animosity aroused in me. Though I might have expected anything, I was stunned; it was as if he had appeared before me quite suddenly in all his hideousness. But I remember my sensations were confused, as though I had been crushed and bruised by something, and black misery gnawed more and more painfully at my heart. I was afraid for Natasha. I foresaw much suffering for her in the future, and I cast about in perplexity for some way by which to avoid it, to soften these last moments for her, before the final catastrophe. Of that catastrophe there could be no doubt. It was nearing, and one could not but see the form it would take.

I did not notice how I reached home, though the rain was soaking me all the way. It was three o'clock in the morning. I had hardly knocked at the door of my room when I heard a moan, and the door was hurriedly unlocked, as though Nellie had not gone to bed at all but had all this time been waiting for me at the very door. A candle was alight. I glanced into Nellie's face and was frightened; it was completely transformed; her eyes were burning feverishly, and had a wild look as though she did not recognize me. She was in a high fever.

"Nellie, what's the matter, are you ill?" I asked, bending down to her and putting my arm round her.

She nestled up to me tremulously as if she were afraid of something, started saying something, rapidly and impetuously, as though she had only been waiting for me to tell me this. But her words were strange and incoherent; I could understand nothing. She was in delirium.

I led her quickly to bed. But she continued to cling to me and hug me tightly as though in terror, as though

begging me to protect her from someone, and when she was settled in bed she still kept seizing my hand and holding it tightly, afraid that I might go away again. I was so upset and my nerves were so shaken that I actually began to cry as I looked at her. I was ill myself. When she saw my tears she gazed long and fixedly at me with strained, concentrated attention, as if trying to grasp and understand something. It was evident that this cost her great effort. At last some resemblance of thought appeared in her face; after a violent epileptic fit she was usually unable to collect her thoughts for some time or to articulate distinctly. It was thus now, too. After making a tremendous effort to say something to me and realizing that I did not understand, she stretched out her little hand and began to wipe away my tears, then threw her arms round my neck, drew me down to her and kissed me.

It was clear that she had had a fit in my absence, and it had seized her at the moment when she had been standing at the door. After the attack had passed she had probably been unable to come to herself for a long time. Reality is mixed up with delirium at that time and she must have imagined something horrible, some nightmare. At the same time she must have been dimly aware that I was to come back soon and should knock at the door, and so, lying right in the doorway on the floor, she had been on the alert for my coming and had risen at my first tap.

"But why should she have been at the door," I wondered, and suddenly I noticed with amazement that she was wearing her overcoat (I had just got it for her from an old pedlar woman I knew who had called at my lodgings and who occasionally sold me her wares on credit). So she must have been meaning to go out, and had probably been already unlocking the door when she was suddenly struck down by the fit. Where could she

have been going? Could she have been in delirium even then?

Meanwhile her temperature was not dropping, and she soon sank into delirium and unconsciousness again. She had already twice had a fit in my flat, but it had always passed off harmlessly; now, however, she seemed in a high fever. After sitting beside her for half an hour I pushed some chairs up to the sofa and lay down, in all my clothes, near to her that I might wake instantly if she called me. I did not put the candle out. I looked at her many times again before I fell asleep myself. She was pale; her lips were parched with fever and stained with blood, probably from the fall; her face still retained the look of terror and a sort of poignant anguish which seemed to be haunting her even in her sleep. I made up my mind to go for the doctor as early as possible next morning, if she were worse. I was afraid that it might end in actual brain fever.

"It was the prince who had frightened her!" I thought, with a shudder, and I remembered his story of the woman who had thrown her money in his face.

CHAPTER II

... Two weeks went by; Nellie was recovering. She did not develop brain fever but she was seriously ill. She only left her bed on a bright sunny day at the end of April. It was Passion Week.

Poor creature! I cannot go on with my story in the same consecutive way. Now that I am describing all this it is long past, but to this minute I recall with an oppressive, piercing anguish that pale, thin little face, the searching, intent gaze of her black eyes when we were left alone together, and she would look, look long at me from her bed as though challenging me to guess what

was in her mind; but seeing that I could not guess and was still puzzled she would smile gently, as it were to herself, and would suddenly hold out to me her hot little hand, with its thin, wasted fingers. Now everything is over, everything has been explained, but to this day I do not know all the secrets of that sick, tortured and outraged little heart.

I feel that I am digressing, but at this moment I want to think only of Nellie. Strangely, now that I am alone, in a hospital, abandoned by all whom I loved so fondly and intensely—now some trivial incident of that past, often unnoticed by me at the time and soon forgotten, suddenly comes back to my mind all at once and takes on an absolutely different meaning, completing the picture and clarifying to me what I had failed to understand till now.

For the first four days of her illness, we, the doctor and I, were terribly alarmed about her, but on the fifth day the doctor took me aside and told me that there was no cause for fear and she would certainly recover. This doctor was the one I had known so long, a good-natured and eccentric old bachelor whom I had called in when Nellie had first fallen ill, and who had so impressed her by the huge Stanislav cross on his neck.

"So there's no cause for fear at all," I said, greatly relieved.

"No, she'll get well this time, but then she will die quite soon."

"Die? But why?" I cried, astounded at this death sentence.

"Yes, she is certain to die quite soon. The patient has an organic defect of the heart, and at the slightest unfavourable circumstance she'll be laid up again. She will perhaps recover again, but then she'll be back in bed and finally she'll die."

"And can nothing be done to save her? No, that cannot possibly be!"

"But it must be. However, with the removal of unfavourable circumstances, with a quiet and unruffled life, with more pleasure in it, death might yet be staved off and there even are cases . . . unexpected . . . strange and exceptional . . . in fact the patient may even be saved by a concatenation of favourable conditions, but radically cured—never."

"But, my God, what's to be done now?"

"Follow my advice, lead a quiet life, and take the powders regularly. I have noticed this young lady is capricious, of an unstable temperament, and even given to mocking. She much dislikes taking her powders regularly and she has just refused them absolutely."

"Yes, doctor. She certainly is strange, but I put it all down to her morbid irritability. Yesterday she was very obedient; yet today when I gave her her medicine she pushed the spoon as if by accident and it was all spilt over. When I wanted to mix another powder for her she snatched the box away from me, threw it on the floor and then burst into tears. Only I don't think it was because I was making her take the powers," I added, after a moment's thought.

"Hm! Irritability! Her past great misfortunes" (I had told the doctor fully and frankly much of Nellie's history and my story had amazed him very much), "all that merges together, and from it this illness. For the time the only thing to do is to take the powders and she must take the powders. I will go and try once more to impress on her the duty to obey medical instructions, and . . . that is speaking generally . . . take the powders."

We both came out of the kitchen (in which our conversation had taken place) and the doctor went up to the sick child's bedside again. But I think Nellie must have overheard us; at least she had raised her head from the

pillow and turning her ear in our direction listened keenly all the time. I had noticed this through the crack of the door, but when we went in to her the rogue ducked under the covers again, and peeped out at us with a mocking smile. The poor child had grown very thin during the four days of her illness: her eyes were sunken and her fever had not left her yet, so that the mischievous expression and glittering, defiant glances so surprising to the doctor—the kindest man of all the Germans in Petersburg—looked all the more incongruous on her face.

Gravely, but trying to soften his voice as much as possible, he began to explain in the gentlest and sweetest manner how essential and efficacious the powders were, and consequently how incumbent it was on every invalid to take them. Nellie was raising her head, but suddenly, with an apparently quite accidental movement of her arm, she touched the spoon, and all the medicine was spilt on the floor again. I was certain she did it on purpose.

“That’s very regrettable carelessness,” said the old man calmly, “and I suspect that you did it on purpose, which is very reprehensible. But . . . we can set it right and prepare another powder.”

Nellie laughed straight in his face. The doctor shook his head methodically.

“That’s very wrong,” he said, opening another powder, “very, very reprehensible.”

“Don’t be angry with me,” answered Nellie, and vainly tried not to laugh again. “I’ll certainly take it. But do you like me?”

“If you will behave yourself properly I shall like you very much.”

“Very much?”

“Very much.”

“And you don’t like me now?”

“I like you even now.”

"And will you kiss me if I want to kiss you?"

"Yes, if you will merit it."

At this Nellie could not control herself and laughed again.

"The patient has a merry disposition, but now—it's nerves and caprice," the doctor whispered to me with a most serious air.

"Very well then, I'll take the powder," Nellie cried suddenly, in her weak little voice. "But when I am grown up will you marry me?"

Apparently the invention of this new naughtiness greatly delighted her; her eyes positively shone and her lips twitched with laughter as she waited for a reply from the somewhat astonished doctor.

"Well, yes," he answered, smiling involuntarily at this new whim, "well, yes, if you turn out a kind, well-bred young lady, and will be obedient and will...."

"Take my powders?" put in Nellie.

"O-ho! To be sure, take your powders. A good girl," he whispered to me again; "there's a great deal, a great deal in her ... that's good and clever but still ... marriage ... what a strange caprice...."

And he took the medicine up to her again. But this time she made no pretence about it but simply jerked the spoon up from below with her hand and all the medicine was splashed on the poor doctor's shirt-front and in his face. Nellie burst into loud laughter, but not with the same merry good-humouredness as before. Something cruel and malicious flashed in her eyes. All this time she seemed to avoid my eyes, and only looked at the doctor with a mocking smile, through which some uneasiness was nevertheless discernible, waiting to see what the "funny" old man would do next.

"Oh! You've done it again! What a misfortune! But ... I can mix you another powder!" said the old man, wiping his face and his shirt-front with his handkerchief.

This was a great surprise for Nellie. She was anticipating our anger, she thought that we should begin to scold and reprove her, and perhaps at that moment she was unconsciously longing for nothing but some excuse to cry, to sob hysterically, to throw away more powders as she had done in the morning and even to break something in her vexation, and with all this to relieve her capricious and aching little heart. Such capricious humours are to be found not only in the sick and not only in Nellie. How often I have walked up and down the room with the unconscious and impatient desire that someone should insult me or utter some word that I could interpret as an insult in order to vent my anger upon someone. Women, venting their anger in that way, begin to cry, shedding the most genuine tears, and the more emotional of them even go into hysterics. It's very simple and everyday experience, and happens most often when there is some other sorrow in one's heart, often a sorrow no one knows about, to which one longs to give utterance but cannot.

But, struck by the angelic kindness of the old doctor and the patience with which he set to work to mix her another powder without a word of reproach, Nellie suddenly subsided. The mocking smile vanished from her lips, colour rushed to her face and her eyes grew moist. She stole a look at me and turned away at once. The doctor offered her the medicine. She took it meekly and shyly, seized the old man's plump red hand, and looked slowly into his face.

"You . . . are angry that I'm so horrid," she began to say, but could not finish, ducked under the blanket, hid her head and burst into loud, hysterical sobs.

"Oh, my child, don't cry! It is nothing. It's nerves, drink some water."

But Nellie was not listening.

"Quiet now . . . don't upset yourself," he went on,

almost whimpering over her, for he was a very sensitive man. "I forgive you and I'll marry you if, like a good, well-behaved young lady, you'll...."

"Take my powders," came from under the blanket with a little nervous laugh that tinkled like a bell, and was broken by sobs—a laugh I knew so well.

"A good-hearted, grateful child!" said the doctor solemnly, almost with tears in his eyes. "Poor girl!"

And from that day a strange and wonderful affection sprang up between him and Nellie. With me, on the contrary, Nellie became more and more sullen, nervous, and irritable. I didn't know what to ascribe this to, and wondered at her, especially as this change in her occurred so suddenly. During the first days of her illness she was particularly tender and sweet with me; it seemed she could not take her eyes off me, she would not let me leave her side, clutched my hand in her feverish little hand and made me sit beside her, and if she noticed that I was gloomy and worried she tried to cheer me up, joked, played with me and smiled at me, evidently suppressing her own sufferings. She did not want me to work at night, or to sit up to look after her, and was grieved because I would not listen to her. Sometimes I noticed a worried look in her face; she would begin to question me, to try and find out why I was sad, what was on my mind. But strange to say, when Natasha's name was mentioned she immediately dropped the conversation or began to speak of something else. She seemed to avoid speaking of Natasha, and that surprised me. When I came home she was delighted. But when I took up my hat she looked at me dejectedly and rather strangely, following me with her eyes, as it were, reproachfully.

On the fourth day of her illness I spent the whole evening with Natasha and stayed long after midnight. There was a lot we had to discuss. As I went out, however, I told my invalid that I should be back very soon,

as indeed I expected to be. Being detained rather inadvertently at Natasha's I felt quite easy in my mind about Nellie: she was not alone. Alexandra Semyonovna was sitting up with her, having heard from Masloboyev, who had come in to see me for a moment, that Nellie was ill and that I had a great deal of worries and was absolutely on my own. Good heavens, what a to-do kind-hearted Alexandra Semyonovna was in!

"So of course he won't come to dinner with us now! Ah, mercy on us! And he's all alone, poor fellow, all alone! Well, now we can show how kindly we feel to him. Here's the opportunity and we mustn't let it slip."

She immediately appeared at my flat, bringing a whole hamper with her in a cab. Declaring at the first word that she was going to stay and had come to help me in my trouble, she undid her parcels. There were syrups and preserves the patient could have now; chickens if she were well enough for them; apples for baking, oranges, dry Kiev preserves (in case the doctor would allow them) and finally linen, bed-sheets, dinner napkins, night-gowns, bandages, compresses—an outfit for a whole hospital.

"We've got everything," she said to me, speaking rapidly and fussily as if she were in a hurry, "while you, now, are living like a bachelor. You have not much of all this. So please allow me . . . and Filip Filippovich wishes it. Well, what now . . . make haste, make haste, what shall I do now? How is she? Conscious? Ah, how uncomfortable she must be! I'll put her pillow straight, to make it lower for her head, and what do you think, wouldn't a leather pillow be better? The leather is cooler. Ah, what a fool I am! It never occurred to me to bring one. I'll go and get it. Oughtn't we to light a fire? I'll send my old woman to you. I know an old woman. You've no housemaid, have you? Well, what shall I do now? What's this? Herbs . . . did the doctor prescribe

them? To make herb tea, I suppose? I'll go and light the fire now."

But I reassured her, and she was much surprised and even rather chagrined that there wasn't so very much to do. But this did not discourage her altogether. She made friends with Nellie at once and was a great help to me all through her illness. She visited us almost every day and she always used to come in looking as though something had been lost or had gone astray and she must hasten to catch it up. She always added that it was also Filip Filippovich's wish. Nellie liked her very much. They took to each other like two sisters, and I fancy that in many respects Alexandra Semyonovna was as much of a child as Nellie. She used to tell her various stories and amuse her, and Nellie often missed her when she had gone home. Her first appearance in our home surprised my invalid, but she quickly guessed why the uninvited visitor had come, and as usual frowned and became silent and ungracious.

"Why had she come to see us?" asked Nellie with an air of displeasure after Alexandra Semyonovna had gone away.

"To help you, Nellie, and to look after you."

"But why? What for? I've never done anything like that for her."

"Kind people don't wait till things are done for them, Nellie. They like to help people who need it, without that. Come, Nellie, there are lots of kind people in the world. It's just your misfortune that you haven't met any and didn't meet them when you needed them."

Nellie did not speak. I walked away from her. But a quarter of an hour later she called me to her in a weak voice, asked for something to drink, and suddenly hugged me warmly and for a long while would not let go of me. Next day, when Alexandra Semyonovna appeared, she welcomed her with a joyful smile, though she still seemed somehow shy of her.

CHAPTER III

That was the day I spent the whole evening at Natasha's. I arrived home late. Nellie was asleep. Alexandra Semyonovna was sleepy too, but she was still sitting up with the patient waiting for me to come home. At once in a hurried whisper she began to tell me that Nellie had at first been very gay, even laughed a great deal, but afterwards she became dispirited and, as I did not come back, grew silent and thoughtful. "Then she began complaining of a headache, began to cry, and sobbed so that I really didn't know what to do with her," Alexandra Semyonovna added. "She began talking to me about Natalya Nikolayevna, but I could not tell her anything. She left off questioning me but went on crying and at last cried herself to sleep. Well, good-bye, Ivan Petrovich. She's better anyway, I can see it, and I must go home, Filip Filippovich told me to. I must confess that this time he only let me come for two hours but I stayed on of myself. But never mind, don't worry about me, he won't dare be angry. Only perhaps. . . . Oh, my goodness, Ivan Petrovich, dear, what am I to do? He always comes home tipsy now! He's very busy over something, and doesn't talk to me, he's worried, he's got some important business on his mind; I can see that; but yet he is drunk every evening. What I'm thinking is, if he has come home, who will put him to bed? Well, I'm going, I'm going, good-bye. Good-bye, Ivan Petrovich. I've been looking at your books here. What a lot of books you've got, and they must all be clever ones. And I'm such a fool I've never read anything. Well, till tomorrow."

But next morning Nellie woke up depressed and sullen, and hardly answered me. She did not speak to me of her own accord, as though she were angry with me. I only noticed some glances of hers thrown at me stealthily, as it were, on the sly; these glances held a great

deal of some concealed and heart-felt pain, yet there was in them a tenderness too, which was not apparent when she looked at me directly. It was on that day that the scene over the medicine took place with the doctor. I did not know what to think.

But Nellie was entirely changed to me. Her strange ways, her caprices, at times almost hatred for me, continued up to the day when she ceased to live with me, till the very catastrophe which was the dénouement of our drama. But of that later.

It sometimes happened, however, that for an hour or so she would be as affectionate to me as before. Her tenderness seemed redoubled at such moments, and mostly at such times, too, she wept bitterly. But these hours soon passed and she sank back into the same misery as before, and looked at me with hostility again or was as capricious as she had been with the doctor, or suddenly noticing that I did not like some new naughtiness of hers, she would begin laughing, and almost always end in tears.

She even quarrelled with Alexandra Semyonovna once, and told her that she wanted nothing from her. When I began to upbraid her in Alexandra Semyonovna's presence she flared up, answered with an outburst of accumulated spite, but suddenly relapsed into silence and did not say another word to me for two days, would not take any medicine, refused even to eat and drink and the old doctor alone finally managed to bring her to reason and remorse.

I have mentioned already that from the day of the scene over the medicine an amazing affection had sprung up between the doctor and Nellie. She had grown to love him and always greeted him with a cheerful smile however sad she had been before he came. For his part the old man began calling on us every day and sometimes twice a day even after Nellie had begun to get up and had

almost fully recovered, and she seemed to have so bewitched him that he could not spend a day without hearing her laugh and make fun of him, sometimes very amusingly. He took to bringing her illustrated books, always of an edifying character. One of them he bought on purpose for her. Then he began bringing her sweets in pretty boxes. On such occasions he would come in with a solemn air, as though it were his birthday, and Nellie guessed at once that he had come with a present. But he did not display the present and only laughed slyly, seating himself beside Nellie, and hinted that if a certain young lady knew how to behave herself and had been deserving of commendation in his absence the young lady in question would merit a handsome reward. And all the while he looked at her so kindly and good-naturedly that although Nellie laughed at him in the frankest way, her radiant eyes betrayed a sincere affection. At last the old man would solemnly get up from his chair, take out the box of sweets and handing it to Nellie would invariably add: "To my future and beloved spouse." At that moment he was probably even happier than Nellie.

Then they would begin to talk, and every time he earnestly and persuasively exhorted her to take care of her health and gave her impressive medical advice.

"Above all one must take care of one's health," he declared dogmatically, "firstly and chiefly in order to remain alive, and secondly in order to be always in good health and so to attain happiness in life. If you have any sorrows, my dear child, forget them, or, better still, try not to think of them. If you have no sorrows . . . well, then too, don't think about them, but try to think only of pleasant things . . . of something jolly and light."

"And what shall I think of that's jolly and light?" Nellie would ask.

The doctor was at once nonplussed.

"Well . . . of some innocent game appropriate to your age or, well . . . something of that sort."

"I don't want to play games, I don't like games," said Nellie. "I much prefer new dresses."

"New dresses! Hm! Well, that's not so good. We should in all things be content with a modest lot in life. However . . . maybe . . . there's no harm in being fond of new dresses."

"And will you give me a lot of dresses when I marry you?"

"What an idea!" said the doctor and he could not help frowning. Nellie smiled slyly, and even forgetting herself for a minute, glanced at me.

"However, I'll give you a dress if you deserve it by your conduct," the doctor went on.

"And must I take my medicine every day when I'm married to you?"

"Oh, well, you need not always take your medicine then."

And the doctor began to smile.

Nellie interrupted the conversation by laughing. The old man laughed with her, and watched her merriment affectionately.

"A playful sportive mind!" he observed turning to me. "But still one can see signs of caprice and a certain whimsicalness and irritability."

He was right. I could not make out what was happening to her. She seemed utterly unwilling to speak to me, as though I were guilty towards her in some way. This hurt me deeply. I even grew gloomy myself, and once I did not speak to her for a whole day, but on the morrow I felt ashamed. She cried often and I hadn't a notion how to comfort her. On one occasion, however, she broke her silence with me.

One afternoon I returned home just before dusk and saw Nellie hurriedly hide a book under the pillow. It was

my novel which she had taken from the table and had been reading in my absence. What need had she to hide it from me? "Just as though she were ashamed," I thought, but I showed no sign of having noticed anything. A quarter of an hour later when I went out for a minute into the kitchen she quickly jumped out of bed and put the novel back where it had been before; when I came back I saw it lying on the table. A minute later she called me to her; there was a ring of some emotion in her voice. For the last four days she had hardly spoken to me.

"Are you . . . going to see Natasha today?" she asked me in a breaking voice.

"Yes, Nellie. It's very necessary for me to see her to-day."

Nellie did not speak.

"Do you . . . love her . . . very much?" she asked again, in a faint voice.

"Yes, Nellie, very much."

"I love her too," she added softly. There was another pause.

"I want to go to her and live with her," Nellie resumed with a timid glance at me.

"That's impossible, Nellie," I answered, with some surprise. "Are you so badly off with me?"

"Why is it impossible?" And she flushed crimson. "Why, haven't you been persuading me to go and live with her father? But I don't want to go there. Has she a servant?"

"Yes."

"Well, let her send her servant away and I'll be her servant. I'll do everything for her and not take any wages. I'll love her, and do her cooking. You tell her so today."

"But what for? Why these fancies, Nellie! And what an idea you must have of her; do you suppose she would take you as a cook? If she did take you she would take you as an equal, as her younger sister."

"No, I don't want to be an equal. I don't want it like that."

"But why?"

Nellie said nothing. Her lips were twitching; she wanted to cry.

"The man she loves now is going away from her and deserting her, isn't he?" she asked at last.

I was surprised.

"But what makes you think so, Nellie?"

"You told me all about it yourself; and the day before yesterday when Alexandra Semyonovna's husband came in the morning I asked him; he told me everything."

"Why, did Maslobojev come in the morning?"

"Yes," she answered, dropping her eyes.

"Why didn't you tell me he'd been here?"

"I don't know."

I reflected for a moment. "Goodness only knows why this Maslobojev man keeps coming here with his mysteriousness. What sort of friendship has he started with her? I ought to see him," I thought.

"Well, what is it to you, Nellie, if he does desert her?"

"But you love her so much," said Nellie without raising her eyes to mine. "And if you love her you'll marry her when that other man goes away."

"No, Nellie, she doesn't love me as I love her, and I . . . No, it cannot be, Nellie."

"And I would work for you both as your servant and you'd live happily," she said, almost in a whisper, not looking at me.

"What is the matter with her? What is the matter?" I thought, and a pang clutched at my heart. Nellie grew silent and she didn't say another word all the evening. When I had gone she burst out crying, and cried the whole evening, as Alexandra Semyonovna told me, and so fell asleep in tears. And even at night she cried and kept saying something in her sleep.

But from that day she grew even more sullen and reticent, and didn't speak to me at all. It is true I caught two or three glances stolen at me furtively, and there was such tenderness in those glances! But this passed together with the moment that called forth that sudden tenderness, and as though in opposition to this impulse Nellie became gloomier with every hour even with the doctor, who was amazed at the change in her. Meanwhile she had almost completely recovered, and the doctor at last allowed her to go for a walk in the open air, but only for a very short time. The weather was warm and bright. It was Passion Week, which fell very late that year; I went out in the morning; it was imperative for me to be at Natasha's but I intended to return earlier in order to take Nellie out for a walk. Meantime I left her alone at home.

I cannot describe the blow that was awaiting me on my return. I hurried home. When I arrived I saw that the key was sticking in the outside of the lock. I went in. There was no one there. I was numb with apprehension. There on the table I saw a piece of paper, and written on it in pencil in a big, uneven handwriting:

"I have left you and I shall never come back to you. But I love you very much.

"Your faithful Nellie."

I uttered a cry of horror and rushed out of the flat.

CHAPTER IV

Before I had reached the street, before I had time to consider what was to be done, I suddenly saw a droshky coming to a halt at our gate, and Alexandra Semyonovna getting down from the droshky leading Nellie by the hand. She was holding her tightly as though she were afraid she might run away again. I rushed up to them.

"Nellie, what is it!" I cried, "where have you been, why did you go?"

"Wait a minute, don't be so impatient; let's hurry upstairs. There you shall hear all about it," twittered Alexandra Semyonovna. "The things I have to tell you, Ivan Petrovich," she whispered hurriedly on the way. "One can only wonder.... Come along, you shall hear immediately."

It was written all over her face that she had extremely important news.

"Go along, Nellie, go along, lie down a little," she said as soon as we got into the room, "you're tired, you know; it's no joke running about so far, and it's too much after an illness; lie down, darling, lie down. And we'll go out of the room for a little, we won't disturb her; let her have a sleep."

And she winked at me to follow her into the kitchen.

But Nellie didn't lie down; she sat down on the sofa and hid her face in her hands.

We went into the other room, and Alexandra Semyonovna told me briefly what had happened. Afterwards I heard about it in more detail. This is what had happened.

Going out of the flat some two hours before my return and leaving the note for me, Nellie had run first to the old doctor's. She had contrived to find out his address beforehand. The doctor told me that he was absolutely petrified when he saw her, and "could not believe his eyes," all the while she was there. "I can't believe it even now," he added, as he finished his story, "and I never shall believe it." And yet Nellie *had* been at his house. He had been sitting quietly in an armchair in his study in his dressing-gown, having his coffee, when she ran in and threw herself on his neck before he could collect his wits. She was crying, she embraced and kissed him, kissed his hands and earnestly though incoherently

begged him to let her stay with him, declaring that she wouldn't and couldn't live with me any longer, and that's why she had left me; that she was unhappy; that she wouldn't laugh at him any more or talk about new dresses, but would behave herself and try to learn, that she would learn to "wash and starch his shirt-front" (she had probably prepared her whole speech on the way there or perhaps even before), and that, in fact, she would be obedient and would take any powders he ordered every day if necessary. And that as for her saying she wanted to marry him it had only been a joke, and she had no such idea. The old German was so dumbfounded that he sat open-mouthed the whole time, forgetting the cigar he held in his hand till it went out.

"Mademoiselle," he brought out at last, recovering some of his power of speech, "so far as I can understand you, you are asking me to give you a situation in my household. But that's impossible. As you see I'm very much cramped and my income is not considerable . . . and, after all, to act so rashly without reflection. . . . It's awful! And, then you, so far as I can see, have run away from home. That is reprehensible and impossible. . . . And what's more, I only allowed you to take a short walk in fine weather in charge of your benefactor, and you abandon your benefactor and run off to me when you ought to be taking care of yourself and . . . and . . . taking your medicine. And, in fact . . . in fact . . . I understand nothing at all. . . ."

Nellie did not let him finish. She began to cry and implore him again, but nothing was of use. The old man grew more and more bewildered, and less and less able to understand. At last Nellie gave him up and crying: "Oh God!" ran out of the room. "I was ill all that day," the old doctor said in conclusion, "and had taken a decoction before turning in. . . ."

Nellie rushed off to the Masloboyevs'. She had provided herself with their address too, and she found them, though not without difficulty. Maslobojev was at home. Alexandra Semyonovna was astonished when she heard Nellie beg them to take her in. When she asked her why she wanted it so badly, what was wrong, and whether she was unhappy with me, Nellie made no answer, but threw herself sobbing into a chair. "She sobbed so violently, so violently," said Alexandra Semyonovna, "that I thought she would die from it." Nellie begged to be taken if only as a housemaid or a cook, said she would sweep the floors and learn to do the washing. (She rested some special hopes on this washing business, and seemed for some reason to think this the strongest inducement for people to take her.) Alexandra Semyonovna's idea was to keep her till the matter was cleared up, meanwhile letting me know. But Filip Filipovich opposed it firmly and told her to take the runaway to me at once. On the way Alexandra Semyonovna had been kissing and embracing her, which had made Nellie cry more than ever. Looking at her Alexandra Semyonovna, too, had shed tears. So both of them had been crying all the way in the cab.

"But why, Nellie, why don't you want to stay with him? Is he unkind to you, or what is it?" Alexandra Semyonovna asked, tears running down her cheeks.

"No."

"Well, why then?"

"Nothing. I don't want to stay with him. I can't. I'm always so nasty with him and he's so kind . . . but with you I won't be nasty, I'll work," she declared, sobbing hysterically.

"Why are you so nasty to him, Nellie?"

"Just so."

"And that was all I could get out of her," concluded Alexandra Semyonovna, wiping her tears. "Why is she

such a miserable little thing? Is it her fits? What do you think, Ivan Petrovich?"

We went in to Nellie. She lay with her face hidden in the pillow, crying. I knelt down beside her, took her hands, and began to kiss them. She snatched her hands from me, and sobbed more violently than ever. I did not know what to say. At that moment old Ikhmenev walked in.

"I've come to see you on business, Ivan, how do you do?" he said, staring at us all, and observing with surprise that I was on my knees.

The old man had been ill of late. He was pale and thin, but as though in defiance of someone, he neglected his illness, refused to listen to Anna Andreyevna's exhortations, went about his daily affairs as usual, and would not take to his bed.

"Good-bye for the present," said Alexandra Semyonovna, giving the old man a keen look. "Filip Filippovich told me to be back as quickly as possible. There's something we've got to do. But in the evening, at dusk, I'll look in on you, and stay an hour or two."

"Who's that?" the old man whispered to me, evidently thinking of something else.

I explained.

"Hm! Well, I've come on business, Ivan."

I knew what the business was, and had been expecting his visit. He had come to talk to me and Nellie and to beg her to go to them. Anna Andreyevna had consented at last to take the orphan in. This was a result of secret confabulations between us. I had persuaded the old lady, telling her that the sight of the child, whose own mother had been cursed by an unrelenting father, might move the old man's heart. I painted my plan so alluringly to her that now she herself began to urge her husband to take the child. The old man readily fell in with it; in the first place he wanted to please his Anna Andreyev-

na, and besides he had motives of his own. . . . But all this I will explain more fully later.

I have mentioned already that Nellie had taken a dislike to the old man since his first visit. Afterwards I noticed that something like hatred gleamed in her face whenever Ikhmenev's name was mentioned in her presence. The old man began upon the subject at once, without beating about the bush. He went straight up to Nellie, who was still lying down, her face hidden in the pillow, and taking her by the hand asked her whether she would like to come and live with him and take the place of his daughter.

"I had a daughter. I loved her more than myself," the old man finished up, "but now she is not with me. She is dead. Would you like to take her place in my house and . . . in my heart?" and in his eyes that were dry and inflamed from fever a tear welled up.

"No, I shouldn't," Nellie answered, without raising her head.

"But why not, my child? You have no one. Ivan cannot keep you with him for ever, and with me you'd be as in your own home."

"I don't want to because you're wicked. Yes, wicked, wicked," she added, lifting her head, and sitting up to face the old man. "I am wicked myself, more wicked than anyone, but you're even worse than I am!"

Saying this Nellie blanched, her eyes flashed; even her quivering lips turned pale and curled in a rush of some strong emotion. The old man looked at her in perplexity.

"Yes, more wicked than I am, because you do not want to forgive your daughter. You want to forget her altogether and take another child, but how can you forget your own child? Do you think you will love me? Whenever you look at me you'll remember I'm a stranger and that you had a daughter of your own whom you had

yourself forgotten because you're a cruel man. And I don't want to live with cruel people. I won't! I won't!" Nellie ended on a sob and gave me a fleeting glance.

"The day after tomorrow is Easter; everyone will be kissing and embracing one another, making up their quarrels, all injuries will be forgiven . . . I know. . . . But you . . . only you . . . ugh, cruel man! Go away!"

She dissolved into tears. She must have made up that speech beforehand and have learnt it by heart in case the old man should ask her again. It had its effect and he turned pale. His face betrayed the pain he was feeling.

"And why, why does everybody make such a fuss over me? I don't want it, I don't want it!" Nellie cried suddenly, as if in a frenzy. "I'll go and beg in the street."

"Nellie, what is it? Nellie, darling!" I cried involuntarily, but my exclamation only added fuel to the flames.

"Yes, I'd rather go into the street and beg, but I won't stay here!" she shrieked sobbing. "My mother begged in the street too, and when she was dying she told me herself: 'Be poor and beg in the street rather than. . . .' It's not shameful to beg: I'm not begging of one, but of everyone and everyone is not one man; to beg of one is shameful, but it's not shameful to beg of all; that's what one beggar-woman told me. I'm a child, I've no means of earning any money. That's why I beg from all. And I won't stay here, I won't, I won't! I'm wicked, I'm more wicked than anyone. See how wicked I am!"

And suddenly Nellie quite unexpectedly seized a cup from the table and threw it on the floor.

"There, now it's broken," she added, looking at me with defiant triumph. "There are only two cups," she added, "I'll break the other one too . . . and then how will you drink your tea?"

She seemed possessed by fury, and seemed to find delight in that fury, it was as though she were conscious

that it was shameful and wrong, and at the same time were spurring herself on to further violence.

"She's ill, Vanya, that's what it is," said the old man, "or . . . or I don't understand what sort of a child this is. Good-bye!"

He took his cap and shook my hand. He seemed crushed. Nellie had insulted him horribly. Everything was in a turmoil within me.

"How could you be so cruel to him, Nellie!" I cried when we were left alone. "Aren't you ashamed? Aren't you ashamed? No, you're not a good girl! You really are wicked!"

And just as I was, without my hat, I ran after the old man. I wanted to take him as far as the gate, and to say at least a few words to comfort him. As I ran down the staircase I seemed to see before me Nellie's face, which had turned terribly white at my reproaches.

I quickly overtook him.

"The poor girl has been ill-treated, and has enough sorrow of her own, believe me, Ivan, and there was I telling her of mine," he said with a bitter smile. "I touched upon her wound. They say that the well-fed cannot understand the hungry, but I would add that the hungry do not always understand the hungry. Well, good-bye!"

I would have spoken of something else; but the old man waved me off.

"Don't try to comfort me. You'd much better look out that that girl of yours doesn't run away from you; she looks as if she might," he added with exasperation, and he walked away from me with rapid steps, brandishing his stick and tapping it on the pavement.

He had no idea that he'd be a prophet.

What were my feelings when, on returning to my room, I found, to my horror, that Nellie had vanished again! I rushed into the passage, looked for her on the

stairs, called her name, even knocked at the neighbours' doors and inquired about her. I could not, and would not, believe that she had run away again. And how could she have run away? There was only one gateway; she would have had to go past when I was talking to the old man. But I soon realized, to my great distress, that she might have first hidden somewhere on the stairs till I had gone back, and then have slipped off so that I should not meet her. In any case she could not have gone far.

In great anxiety I rushed off to search for her again, leaving my rooms unlocked in case she should return.

First of all I went to the Masloboyevs'. I did not find either of them at home. Leaving a note for them in which I informed them of this fresh calamity, and begging them if Nellie came to let me know at once, I went to the doctor's. He was not at home either. The servant told me that Nellie had only been there once, that morning. What was I to do? I set off for Bubnova's and learnt from the coffin-maker's wife that her landlady had for some reason been detained at the police station for the last two days; and Nellie had not been seen there since *that day*. Weary and exhausted I went back to the Masloboyevs'. It was the same, no one had come, and they had not returned home themselves. My note lay on the table. What was I to do?

It was in mortal dejection that I was returning home late in the evening. I ought to have been at Natasha's that evening, she had asked me herself in the morning. But I had not even tasted food that day. The thought of Nellie set my whole soul in a turmoil.

"What does it mean?" I wondered. "Can it possibly be some strange consequence of her illness? Can it be that she is mad, perhaps, or going out of her mind? But, good God, where is she now? Where shall I find her?"

I had hardly said this to myself when I caught sight

of Nellie a few steps from me on the Vasilyevsky Bridge. She was standing under a street-lamp and she did not see me. I was on the point of running to her but I checked myself. "What can she be doing here?" I wondered, but certain now that I should not lose her, I resolved to wait and watch her. Ten minutes or so passed, she was still standing there, watching the passers-by. At last a well-dressed old gentleman came by and Nellie went up to him. Without stopping he took something out of his pocket and gave it to her. She bowed in acknowledgement. I cannot describe what I felt at that instant. My heart cringed painfully, as if something precious, something I had loved, fondled and cherished was disgraced and trampled into the mud at that minute before my very eyes, and I felt tears running down my face.

Yes, tears for poor Nellie, though at the same time I felt an implacable indignation; she was not begging through need; she was not forsaken, not abandoned by someone to her fate; she was not escaping from cruel oppressors, but from her friends who loved and cherished her. It was as though she wanted to shock or alarm someone by her exploits, as though she were showing off before someone. But there was something secret maturing in her heart.... Yes, Ikhmenev was right; she had been ill-treated; her wound would not heal, and she seemed purposely trying to aggravate it by this mysterious behaviour, this mistrustfulness of us all; as though she gloried in her own pain, this *egoism of suffering* if I may so express it. I could understand this aggravation of suffering and this revelling in it: it is the delight of many of the insulted and injured, wronged by destiny, and smarting under the sense of its injustice. But of what injustice in us could Nellie complain? It was as if she wanted to astonish and alarm us by her daring, her caprices and wild pranks, as though she

really were showing off before us.... But no! She was alone now, none of us could see that she was begging. Could she possibly be enjoying begging as such? Why did she want charity? What need had she of money?

After receiving the alms she left the bridge and walked to the brightly lighted window of a shop. There she proceeded to count her gains. I was standing a dozen paces from her. She had a fair amount of money in her hand already; she had evidently been begging since the morning. Clutching it in her hand she crossed the road and went into a small shop. I immediately went up to the door of the shop which stood wide open, and looked to see what she was doing there.

I saw her put the money on the counter and a cup being handed to her, a plain tea-cup, very much like the one she had broken that morning, to show Ikhmenev and me how wicked she was. The cup was worth about fifteen kopeks, perhaps even less. The shopman wrapped it in paper, tied it up and gave it to Nellie, who hurried out of the shop with a satisfied look.

"Nellie!" I cried when she was close, "Nellie!"

She started, glanced at me, the cup slipped from her hands, fell on the pavement and broke. Nellie was pale; but when she looked at me and realized that I had seen and understood everything she suddenly blushed; this blush told of an intolerable, agonizing shame. I took her hand and led her home. We had not far to go. We did not utter one word on the way. When we got home I sat down. Nellie stood before me, thoughtful and embarrassed, as pale as before, with her eyes fixed on the floor. She could not look at me.

"Nellie, you were begging?"

"Yes," she whispered and her head drooped lower still.

"You wanted to get money to buy a cup for the one you broke this morning?"

"Yes...."

"But did I reproach you, did I scold you about that cup? Surely, Nellie, you must see what wickedness, what self-satisfied wickedness there was in your action? Is it right? Aren't you ashamed? Aren't you?"

"I am," she whispered, in a voice hardly audible, and a solitary tear trickled down her cheek.

"You are ..." I said. "Nellie, dearest, if I have wronged you, forgive me and let us be friends again."

She looked at me, tears gushed from her eyes, and she flung herself on my breast.

At that instant Alexandra Semyonovna flew in.

"What? She's home? Again? Oh, Nellie, Nellie, what is going on? Well, it's a good thing she's at home, anyway. Where did you find her, Ivan Petrovich?"

I made a sign to Alexandra Semyonovna not to ask questions and she understood me. I parted tenderly with Nellie, who was still weeping bitterly, and persuaded kind-hearted Alexandra Semyonovna to stay with her till I returned. I ran off to Natasha's. I was late and so I hurried.

That evening our fate was being decided. There was a great deal for Natasha and me to talk over, yet I managed to slip in a word about Nellie and told her all that had happened in full detail. My story greatly interested and indeed astonished Natasha.

"Do you know what, Vanya," she said to me after a moment's thought, "I believe she's in love with you."

"What ... how can that be?" I asked taken aback.

"Yes, it's the beginning of love, a real woman's love."

"How can you, Natasha, nonsense! Why, she's just a child!"

"A child who will soon be fourteen. This bitterness of hers is because you do not understand her love; and perhaps she doesn't understand her own self either. It's a bitterness in which there's a great deal that's childish,

but it's serious, it's agonizing for all that. Above all she's jealous of me. You love me so that I believe even when you're at home you're always worrying, thinking and talking about me, and so you do not take enough notice of her. She has seen that and it has stung her. Perhaps she wants to talk to you, longs to open her heart to you, doesn't know how to do it, is ashamed, and doesn't understand herself, perhaps she is waiting for an opportunity, and instead of precipitating this opportunity you keep away from her, run off to me, and even when she was ill you left her alone for whole days on end. That's what she is crying about; she misses you, and what hurts her most of all is that you don't notice it. Even now, at a moment like this, you have left her alone for my sake. Why, she'll be ill tomorrow because of it. And how could you leave her? Go back to her at once."

"I wouldn't have left her but...."

"Yes, I know, I asked you to come myself. But now go."

"I will, but of course I don't believe a word of it."

"Because it's all so different from everybody else. Remember her story, think it all over and you will believe it. Her childhood was not like yours or mine."

I got home late, nevertheless. Alexandra Semyonovna told me that again Nellie had, as on the previous evening, been crying a great deal and "had fallen asleep in tears" as before.

"And now I'll be going, Ivan Petrovich, as Filip Filipovich told me. He's expecting me, poor fellow."

I thanked her and sat down by Nellie's bedside. I myself felt distressed that I could have left her at a time like this. For a long while, until late at night, I sat beside her, lost in thought.... It was a momentous time for us all.

But I must describe what had been happening during that fortnight.

CHAPTER V

After the memorable evening I had spent with Prince Valkovsky at the restaurant, I was for some days in continual apprehension on Natasha's account. "What was that cursed prince threatening her with, and in what way exactly did he mean to revenge himself on her?" I asked myself every minute, and was lost in various surmises. Finally I came to the conclusion that his threats were not empty talk, not mere bluster, and that as long as she was living with Alyosha, the prince might really cause her much unpleasantness. He was petty, vindictive, malicious, and calculating, I reflected. It was hardly probable that he should forget an insult and let pass any chance of avenging it. He had in any case brought out one point, and had expressed himself pretty clearly on that point: he demanded insistently that Alyosha should break off his connection with Natasha, and was expecting me to prepare her for the approaching separation, and so to prepare her that there should be "no scenes, no idyllic nonsense, no Schillerism." Of course, what he was worried about mainly was that Alyosha should remain pleased with him, and should continue thinking him an affectionate father. This was very necessary to him so that he could the more conveniently lay his hands on Katya's money eventually. And so it was my task to prepare Natasha for the approaching separation. But I noticed a great change in Natasha; there was not a trace of her old frankness with me; in fact, she seemed to have become actually mistrustful of me. My efforts to comfort her only pained her; my questions annoyed her more and more, and even angered her. I would sit in her room sometimes, watching her: she would pace from one corner of the room to the other with her arms folded, pale and gloomy, as though oblivious of everything, even forgetting that I was there. When

she happened to look at me (and she even avoided my eyes), there was a gleam of impatient vexation in her face, and she turned away quickly. I realized that she was perhaps herself revolving some plan of her own for the approaching separation, and how could she think of it without pain and bitterness? And I was convinced that she had already made up her mind to the separation. Yet I was worried and alarmed by her grim despair. Moreover at times I did not dare to talk to her or try to comfort her, and so I waited with terror what the end would be.

As for her harsh and forbidding manner with me, though it worried and hurt me, yet I had faith in my Natasha's heart. I saw that she was terribly wretched and that she was too overwrought. Any outside interference only excited vexation and annoyance. In such cases, the intervention of close friends who know our secrets annoys us more than anything. But I knew very well, too, that at the last minute Natasha would come back to me, and would seek consolation in my affection.

Of my conversation with the prince I said nothing to her, of course; my story would only have distressed her more. I only mentioned casually that I had been with the prince at the countess's and had become convinced that he was an awful scoundrel. But she did not even question me about him, of which I was very glad; she listened eagerly, however, to what I told her of my interview with Katya. Having heard me out she said nothing about Katya either, but colour flooded her pale face, and all that day she seemed especially agitated. I concealed nothing concerning Katya, and confessed frankly that even upon me she had made an excellent impression. And what was the use of hiding it? Natasha would have certainly guessed that I was keeping back something and would only have been angry with me. And so I pur-

posely told her everything as fully as I could, trying to anticipate her questions, especially as in her position it was difficult for her to ask them; it could scarcely be an easy task to inquire with an air of unconcern into the perfections of one's rival.

I thought she did not know yet that on the prince's express instructions Alyosha was to accompany the countess and Katya into the country, and was hesitating how best to break this to her so as to soften the blow. But what was my amazement when Natasha stopped me at the first word and said that there was no need to comfort her and that she had known of this for the last five days.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "but who could have told you?"

"Alyosha!"

"What? He's told you already?"

"Yes, and I have made up my mind about everything, Vanya," she added, with a look which clearly, and, as it were, impatiently warned me not to continue the conversation.

Alyosha came quite often to Natasha's, but always for a minute or two; on one occasion only he stayed with her for several hours, but it happened when I was not there. He usually came in melancholy and looked at her with timid tenderness; but Natasha welcomed him so sweetly and affectionately that he forgot everything at once and brightened up. He had taken to dropping in on me very frequently too, almost every day. It is true that he was very much distressed but he could not remain alone with his sorrow for a single moment, and kept running to me continually for consolation.

What could I say to him? He accused me of coldness, of indifference, even of ill-feeling towards him; he grieved, he shed tears, went off to Katya's, and there was comforted.

The day Natasha told me that she knew Alyosha was going away (it was about a week after my conversation with the prince) he ran into me in despair; embraced me, fell on my neck, and sobbed like a child. I was silent, and waited to hear what he would say.

"I'm a low, a base man, Vanya," he began. "Save me from myself. I'm not crying because I'm low and base, but because through me Natasha will be miserable. I am leaving her to misery. . . . Vanya, my friend, tell me, decide for me, which of them do I love most, Natasha or Katya?"

"That I can't decide, Alyosha," I answered. "You ought to know it better than I."

"No, Vanya, that's not what I want; I'm not so stupid as to ask such a question; but the worst of it is I can't tell myself. I ask myself and I don't know the answer. But you are an onlooker and may see more clearly than I do. Well, even though you don't know, tell me how does it strike you?"

"It seems to me you love Katya best."

"Is that what it seems to you? No, no, not at all! You've not guessed right. I love Natasha beyond everything. I can never leave her, nothing would induce me; I've told Katya so, and she thoroughly agrees with me. Why don't you say something? Well, I saw you smile just now. Oh, Vanya, you have never comforted me when I've been too miserable, as I am now. . . . Good-bye!"

He ran out of the room, having made an extraordinary impression on the astonished Nellie, who had been listening to our conversation in silence. At that time she was still ill, and was laid up and taking medicine. Alyosha never spoke to her, and scarcely took any notice of her on his visits.

Two hours later he turned up again, and I was surprised at his joyous countenance. He threw himself on my neck again and embraced me.

"The thing's settled!" he cried, "all misunderstandings are solved. I went straight from you to Natasha. I was so upset I could not do without her. When I went in I fell at her feet and kissed them; I had to do that, I longed to do it. If I hadn't, I should have died of misery. She embraced me in silence, crying. Then I just told her that I loved Katya more than her."

"What did she say?"

"She said nothing, she only caressed me and comforted me—me, after I had told her that! She knows how to comfort one, Ivan Petrovich! Oh, I wept all my grief out to her—I told her everything. I told her frankly that I was awfully fond of Katya, but however much I loved her, and whomever I loved, I never could exist without her, Natasha, that I should die without her. No, Vanya, I could not live a day without her, I feel that; no! And so we decided to be married at once, and as it can't be done before I go away because it's Lent now, and we can't get married in Lent, it shall be when I come back, and that will be by the first of June. Father will allow it, there can be no doubt of that. And as for Katya, well, what of it! I can't live without Natasha, you know.... We'll be married, and go off there at once, to Katya's."

Poor Natasha! What it must have cost her to comfort this boy, to sit with him, listen to his confession and invent the fairy-tale of their forthcoming marriage to comfort the naive egoist. Alyosha really was comforted for some days. He was in and out of Natasha's mainly because his faint heart was not equal to bearing his grief alone. But yet, as the time of their separation grew nearer, he relapsed into tears and fretting again, and would again come to me and pour out his sorrow. Of late he had become so attached to Natasha, that he could not leave her for a single day, much less for six weeks. He was fully convinced, however, up to the very last minute, that he was only leaving her for six weeks and that on

his return they would be married. As for Natasha, she fully realized that her whole life was to be transformed, that Alyosha would never come back to her now, and that this was how it must be.

The day of their separation was approaching. Natasha was ill, pale, with feverish eyes and parched lips. From time to time she started talking to herself, from time to time threw a rapid and keen glance at me. She shed no tears, did not answer my questions, and quivered like a leaf on a tree when she heard Alyosha's ringing voice at the door. She flushed with a fiery glow, and hurried towards him; she hugged him convulsively, kissed him and, laughed. . . . Alyosha looked searchingly into her face, asking with anxiety after her health, tried to comfort her by saying that he was not going for long, and then—for their wedding day! Natasha made a visible effort, controlled herself, and suppressed her tears. She never cried when he was there.

Once he began to say that he must leave her money to last her all the time he was away, and that she need not worry, because his father had promised to give him plenty for the journey. Natasha frowned. When we were left alone I told her I had a *hundred and fifty rubles* for her in case of need. She did not ask where the money came from. This was two days before Alyosha's departure, and the day before the first and only meeting between Natasha and Katya. Katya had sent a note by Alyosha in which she asked Natasha's permission to visit her the following day, and at the same time she wrote to me and asked me to be present at their interview.

I resolved that I would certainly be at Natasha's at twelve o'clock (the hour fixed by Katya) regardless of all obstacles; and there were many obstacles and delays. Apart from Nellie, I had for the last week had a great deal of worry with the Ikhmenevs.

These worries began a whole week before.

Anna Andreyevna sent for me one morning, begging me to put everything else aside and hasten to her at once on a matter of great importance which admitted of no delay. When I arrived I found her alone: she was walking about the room in a fever of agitation and alarm, in tremulous expectation of her husband's return. As usual it was a long time before I could get out of her what was the matter and why she was in such a panic, while at the same time it was evident that every moment was precious. At last after heated and irrelevant reproaches such as "Why don't you come, why do you leave us all alone like orphans in our sorrow?" so that "Goodness knows what has been happening in your absence," she told me that for the last three days Nikolai Sergeich had been in a state of such agitation, "that there's no describing it."

"He's simply not like himself," she said, "he's in a fever, at night he prays on his knees before the icons in secret from me, he talks in his sleep, and by day he's like a madman. We were having soup yesterday, and he couldn't find the spoon set beside him; you ask him one thing and he answers another. He has taken to running out of the house every minute, he always says: 'I'm going out on business, I must see the lawyer,' and finally this morning he locked himself in his study. 'I have to write an important paper about the lawsuit,' he says. Well, thinks I, how are you going to write an important paper when you can't find your spoon beside your plate? I peeped through the keyhole however: there he was sitting writing, and tears just pouring down his face. That's a queer sort of way to write a business paper, thinks I, or perhaps he's grieving so for our Ikhmenevka! That means it's lost for good, our Ikhmenevka is! Well, I was thinking all this, and then suddenly he jumped up from the table and threw his pen down; his face was all

red and his eyes flashed, and he snatched up his cap and came out to me, 'I'm coming back directly, Anna Andreyevna,' he said. He went out and I was at his writing-table at once. There's such a mass of papers about our lawsuit lying there that he never lets me touch it. How many times have I asked him: 'Do let me lift up those papers for once, I want to dust the table.' But no fear, he begins to shout and wave his arms. He's become so impatient here in Petersburg and so taken to shouting. So I went up to the table and began looking for the paper he had just been writing. I knew for a fact he had not taken it with him but had thrust it under other papers when he got up from the table. Well, this is what I have found, look, Ivan Petrovich, dear."

And she handed me a sheet of note-paper half covered with writing but with so much crossed out and written over that in places it was quite illegible.

Poor old man! From the first lines one could tell what and to whom he was writing. It was a letter to Natasha, to his adored Natasha. He began warmly and tenderly, he approached her with forgiveness and urged her to come home. It was difficult to make out the whole letter, it was written incoherently and impulsively, with numerous corrections. It was only evident that the intense emotion which had compelled him to take up his pen and to write the first heartfelt lines had rapidly, after these opening lines, degenerated into quite a different feeling: the old man began to reproach his daughter, describing her crime to her in vigorous hues, indignantly reminding her of her obstinacy, accusing her of heartlessness, of not having once given a single thought to what she had done to her father and mother. He threatened her with retribution and a curse for her pride, and ended by demanding that she should return home instantly and submissively, "and only then perhaps after a new life of humility and exemplary behaviour in the bosom of your

family we might decide to forgive you," he wrote. It was evident that after the first few lines he had taken his first generous feeling for weakness, had begun to be ashamed of it, and finally, suffering tortures of wounded pride, he had ended in wrath and threats. Anna Andreyevna stood facing me with her hands clasped, waiting in an agony of suspense to hear what I should say about the letter.

I told her quite plainly what I thought, that is, that her husband could not bear to go on living without Natasha, and that it could be positively asserted that their speedy reconciliation was imperative, though everything depended on circumstances. I expressed at the same time my conjecture that probably the failure of his lawsuit had been a great blow and shock to him, to say nothing of the mortification to his pride at the prince's triumph over him and the storm of indignation aroused in him at the way the case had been decided. At a moment like this the heart cannot but seek for sympathy, and his thoughts turned the more forcefully to her whom he had always loved more than anyone on earth. And perhaps too he might have heard (for he was kept informed and knew all about Natasha) that Alyosha was about to abandon her. He might realize what she was going through now and from his own experience knew how much she needed consolation. But yet he could not overpower his pride, considering himself insulted and humiliated by his daughter. It had probably occurred to him that after all she was not the one who was taking the first step, that perhaps she was not even thinking of them and felt no need for reconciliation. "That's what he must have thought," I said in conclusion, "and that's why he didn't finish his letter, and perhaps it would only lead to fresh mortification which would be felt even more keenly than the first, and might, who knows, put off the reconciliation indefinitely."

Anna Andreyevna cried as she listened to me. At last, when I said that I had to go at once to Natasha's, and that I was late, she started, and declared that she had forgotten the *chief* thing. When she was pulling the letter from under the pile of papers she had upset the ink over it. One corner was indeed covered with ink, and the old lady was terribly afraid that her husband would know from this blot that she had been rummaging among his papers in his absence and had read his letter to Natasha. There were good grounds for her alarm; the very fact that we knew his secret might lead him through shame and vexation to persist in his anger, and through pride to withhold his forgiveness doggedly.

But on thinking it over, I persuaded the old lady not to worry. The writing of the letter had so upset him that he might well have no clear recollection of details and would probably now think that he had smudged the letter himself and forgotten it. After I had reassured Anna Andreyevna in this way, and we put the letter back carefully where it had been before, I decided to speak to her seriously about Nellie before I left. It occurred to me that the poor forsaken orphan whose own mother had also been cursed by an unforgiving father might, by the sad and tragic story of her life and of her mother's death, move the old man and inspire him to generous feelings. All was ready, all was ripe in his heart; the longing for his daughter had already begun to get the upper hand of his pride and his wounded vanity. All that was needed was a push, a favourable opportunity, and that opportunity might be provided by Nellie. The old lady listened to me with rapt attention; her whole face lighted up with hope and enthusiasm. She immediately began reproaching me for not having told her long before; began questioning me impatiently about Nellie and ended by solemnly promising that she would of her own accord urge her husband to take the orphan girl into

their house. She already began to feel a genuine affection for Nellie, was sorry to hear that she was ill, questioned me about her, forced a pot of jam on me to take the child which she herself ran to fetch from the store-room, brought me five rubles, thinking I had not enough money for the doctor, and could hardly be pacified when I refused to take it, but consoled herself with the thought that Nellie needed clothes, so that she could be of use to her in that way. Then she proceeded to ransack her chest and to lay out all her dresses, picking out things she might give to the orphan.

I went off to Natasha's. As I mounted the last flight of the staircase, which, as I have said earlier, went round in a spiral, I noticed at her door a man who was on the point of knocking but checked himself on hearing my step. Then, after some hesitation, he apparently abandoned his intention and hurried downstairs. I came upon him at the turn of the stairs, and what was my astonishment when I recognized Ikhmenev. It was very dark on the stairs even in the daytime. He shrank back against the wall to let me pass, and I remember the strange glitter in his eyes as he peered at me intently. I fancied that he flushed painfully, at any rate he was terribly abashed, and even agitated.

"I say, Vanya, why, it's you!" he brought out in a shaky voice. "I've come here to see someone . . . a copying-clerk . . . on business . . . he's lately moved . . . somewhere this way . . . but he doesn't live here it seems. . . . I've made a mistake . . . good-bye."

And he ran quickly down the stairs.

I decided that I would not tell Natasha as yet of this meeting, but would certainly do so after Alyosha had gone and she was left alone. At the moment she was so upset that although she would have understood and realized the full importance of the fact, she would not have been capable of taking it in and appreciating it as

she would at the moment of the last overwhelming misery and despair. This was not an appropriate moment.

I could have gone to the Ikhmenevs' again that day and I felt a great inclination to do so, but I did not. I fancied the old man would feel ill at ease at the sight of me. He might even imagine that I had come because I had met him. I did not go to see them till two days later; the old man was depressed, but he met me with a fairly unconcerned air and talked of nothing but his case.

"I say, who was it you were going to see so high up, when we met, do you remember—when was it?—the day before yesterday, I think?" he asked suddenly, somewhat carelessly, though he looked away from me.

"A man I know lives there," I answered, turning my eyes away too.

"I see; and I was looking for my clerk, Astafyev; I was told it was that house . . . but it was a mistake. Well, as I was just telling you . . . the Senate decided . . ." and so on, and so on.

He even blushed as he changed the subject.

I recounted the episode to Anna Andreyevna the same day, to cheer her up, imploring her among other things not to look at him just now with a significant air, not to sigh, or drop hints, in fact, not to betray in any way that she knew of this last exploit of his. The old lady was so surprised and delighted that at first she would not even believe me. She, for her part, told me that she had already dropped a hint to Nikolai Sergeich about the orphan, but that he had said nothing, though till then he had always been urging her to agree to take the child. We decided that next day she should ask him about it openly, without any hints or beating about the bush. But next day we were both in a state of terrible alarm and anxiety.



What happened was that Ikhmenev had had an interview in the morning with the lawyer who had charge of his case, and the latter had informed him that he had seen the prince, and that, though the prince was retaining possession of Ikhmenevka, yet, "*in consequence of certain family circumstances*," he had decided to compensate the old man and to allow him the sum of ten thousand rubles. The old man came straight to me terribly upset, his eyes flashing with fury. He called me, I don't know why, out of my flat on to the stairs and demanded insistently that I should at once go to the prince and deliver him the challenge to a duel.

I was so overwhelmed that for a long time I could not collect my wits. I made an attempt to dissuade him. A rage so furious seized the old man that he almost had a heart attack. I rushed into the flat for a glass of water, but when I came back I found Ikhmenev no longer on the stairs.

Next day I went to see him, but he was not at home. He disappeared for three whole days.

On the third day we learnt what had happened. He had rushed off from me straight to the prince's, had not found him at home and had left a note for him. In this note he said that he had been informed of the prince's words spoken to the lawyer, that he regarded them as a deadly insult to himself and the prince as a low scoundrel, and in view of all this he was challenging him to a duel, warning him not to dare decline the challenge or he would be publicly insulted.

Anna Andreyevna told me that he returned home in such a state of perturbation and distress that he had to take to his bed. He was very tender with her, but scarcely answered her questions, and was evidently in feverish expectation of something. Next morning a letter came by post. On reading it he had cried out aloud and clutched at his head. Anna Andreyevna was numb with

terror. But he at once snatched up his hat and stick and rushed out.

The letter was from the prince. Dryly, briefly, and politely he informed Ikhmenev that he, Prince Valkovsky, was not obliged to give an account to anyone of what he had said to the lawyer, that though he felt great sympathy with Ikhmenev for the loss of his case, but with all his sympathy he could not feel it just for the man who had lost his case to be entitled to challenge his opponent to a duel by way of revenge. As for the "public insult" with which he was threatened, the prince begged Ikhmenev not to trouble himself about it, for there would be, and could be none: that his letter would at once be presented to the proper quarter, and that the police, forewarned, would no doubt be equal to taking steps for preserving law and order.

With the letter in his hand Ikhmenev immediately set off for the prince's. He was out again, but the old man learnt from the footman that the prince was probably at Count Nainsky's. He at once hurried to the count's. The count's porter stopped him as he was mounting the staircase. Infuriated to the utmost the old man hit him a blow with his stick. He was at once seized, dragged out of the house and handed over to a police officer, who took him to the police station. The count was informed. When the prince, who was present, explained to the decrepit profligate that this was Ikhmenev, the father of that very same Natalya Nikolayevna, (the prince had more than once been of service to the count in *certain enterprises*) the great old gentleman only laughed and took a milder view of the matter: the order was given that Ikhmenev should be set free. But he was only released on the third day, when (no doubt by the prince's orders) he was informed that the prince himself had begged the count to pardon him.

The old man returned home in a state bordering on

insanity, fell on his bed and lay for a whole hour without moving. At last he half rose, and to Anna Andreyevna's horror solemnly declared that he was cursing his daughter *for ever*, and was depriving her of his fatherly blessing.

Anna Andreyevna was horrified, but she had to help the old man, and, herself well nigh demented, she waited upon him all that day and night, wetting his head with vinegar, and putting ice on it. He was feverish and delirious. It was after two in the morning when I left them. But next morning Ikhmenev got up, and came to me the same day to take Nellie home with him for good. I have already described his scene with Nellie. This scene shattered him completely. When he got home he went to bed. All this happened on Good Friday, the day when Katya and Natasha were to meet, and the day before Alyosha's and Katya's departure from Petersburg. I was present at this meeting: it took place early in the morning, before Ikhmenev's visit, and before Nellie ran away the first time.

CHAPTER VI

Alyosha had come an hour earlier to tell Natasha, whereas I arrived at the very moment when Katya's carriage drew up at the gate. Katya was accompanied by an old French lady, who after many persuasions and much hesitation had consented at last to accompany her, and had even agreed to let Katya go up to Natasha without her, but only on condition that Alyosha escorted Katya, while she remained in the carriage. Katya beckoned to me, and without getting out of the carriage asked me to call Alyosha down. I found Natasha in tears. Alyosha and she were both crying. On hearing that Katya was already there, she got up from her chair, wiped her

eyes, and in great excitement took up her stand facing the door. She was dressed all in white that morning. Her dark brown hair was brushed back smoothly and gathered in a heavy knot. I particularly liked that way of doing her hair. When she saw that I was staying behind with her, Natasha asked me to go out and meet the visitors too.

"I could not get to Natasha's before," Katya was saying to me as she mounted the stairs. "I've been so spied on that it's awful. I've been persuading Mme. Albert for a whole fortnight, and at last she consented. And you have never once been to see me, Ivan Petrovich! I couldn't write to you either, and I didn't feel like writing for you can't explain anything in a letter. And I wanted to see you so much. . . . Good heavens, how my heart is beating. . . ."

"The stairs are steep," I answered.

"Yes . . . the stairs too . . . tell me, what do you think, will Natasha be angry with me?"

"No, why?"

"Well yes . . . of course . . . why should she? I shall see for myself directly, why ask?"

I gave her my arm. She even paled, and I believe she was very much frightened. On the last landing she stopped to take breath, but she glanced at me and went up resolutely.

She stopped once more at the door and whispered to me: "I shall simply go in and say I had such faith in her that I was not afraid to come. . . . But why am I talking, I'm certain that Natasha is the noblest creature. Isn't she?"

She went in timidly as though she were at fault, and looked intently at Natasha, who at once smiled at her. Then Katya ran swiftly to her, seized her hands and pressed her full pretty lips to Natasha's. Then, before she said a word to Natasha, she turned earnestly and

even sternly to Alyosha and asked him to leave us alone for half an hour.

"Don't be cross, Alyosha," she added, "it's because I have a great deal to talk about with Natasha, of very important and serious things that you ought not to hear. Be good, and go away. But you stay, Ivan Petrovich. You must hear all our conversation."

"Let us sit down," she said to Natasha when Alyosha had left the room. "I'll sit like this, opposite you. I want to look at you first."

She sat down almost exactly opposite Natasha and gazed at her for some minutes. Natasha responded with an involuntary smile.

"I have seen your photograph already," said Katya. "Alyosha showed it to me."

"Well, is it a good likeness?"

"You're better," Katya replied resolutely and gravely. "But I was quite sure you would be."

"Really? And I can't tear my eyes off *you*. How pretty you are!"

"Me! Oh, no! My darling!" she added, taking Natasha's hand with her own trembling one, and both relapsed into silence again, gazing at each other.

"I must tell you, my angel," Katya broke the silence, "we have only half an hour to be together; Mme. Albert would hardly consent even to that much, and we have a great deal to discuss. I want . . . I must . . . well, I'll simply ask you—do you love Alyosha very much?"

"Yes, very much."

"But if so . . . if you love Alyosha very much . . . then . . . you must care for his happiness too," she added timidly, in a whisper.

"Yes. I want him to be happy."

"Yes. But this is the question—shall I make him happy? Have I the right to say so, taking him away from you as

I am. If you think, and we decide now that he will be happier with you, then . . . then. . . .”

“But that’s all settled already, Katya dear, you can see yourself that it’s all settled,” Natasha answered softly, and bowed her head. She evidently found it hard to continue the conversation.

Katya, I think, was prepared for a lengthy discussion on the question which of them would make Alyosha happy and which of them ought to give him up. But after Natasha’s answer she understood at once that everything had long been settled and there was nothing to discuss. With her pretty lips half parted, she gazed with sorrow and perplexity at Natasha, still holding her hand.

“And do you love him very much?” Natasha asked suddenly.

“Yes; and there’s another thing I wanted to ask you and that’s partly why I came: tell me, what do you love him for exactly?”

“I don’t know,” answered Natasha, and there was a note of bitter impatience in her voice.

“Is he clever do you think?” asked Katya.

“No, I simply love him.”

“And I too. I always feel somehow sorry for him.”

“So do I,” answered Natasha.

“What’s to be done with him now? And how could he leave you for me I can’t understand!” cried Katya. “Now that I’ve seen you I can’t understand it at all!”

Natasha stared at the floor and made no answer. Katya was silent for a while, and suddenly leaving her chair gently embraced her. They embraced each other and both shed tears. Katya sat on the arm of Natasha’s chair still holding her in her embrace, and began kissing her hands.

“If you only knew how I love you!” she said, weeping. “Let us be sisters, let us always write to one another . . .

and I will always love you. . . . I shall love you so . . . love you so. . . ."

"Did he speak to you of our marriage in June?" asked Natasha.

"Yes. He said you'd consented. That's all just . . . to comfort him, isn't it?"

"Of course."

"That's how I understood it. I will love him truly, Natasha, and write to you about everything. It seems he will soon be my husband now; it looks like it; and they all say so too. Darling Natasha, surely you will go . . . home now?"

Natasha did not answer, she only kissed her warmly.

"Be happy!" she said.

"And . . . and you . . . and you too!" said Katya.

At that moment the door opened and Alyosha came in. He had been unable to wait the whole half-hour, and seeing them in each other's arms and both crying, he fell in exhaustion and anguish on his knees before Natasha and Katya.

"But what have you to weep for?" Natasha said to him. "Because you're parting with me? But is it for long? You'll be back by June, won't you?"

"And then you'll be married," Katya hastened to add through her tears, also to comfort Alyosha.

"But I cannot leave you, I cannot leave you for one day, Natasha. I shall die without you. . . . You don't know how precious you are to me now! Especially now!"

"Well, then, this is what you can do," said Natasha, with sudden animation, "the countess will surely stay for a little while in Moscow, won't she?"

"Yes, almost a week," put in Katya.

"A week! Then what could be better: you'll escort them to Moscow tomorrow; that will only take one day and then you can come back here at once. When they are due to leave Moscow, we will say our good-byes for a

month and you will go back to Moscow to accompany them."

"Yes, that's it, that's it . . . you will have an extra four days to be together!" cried Katya, delighted, and exchanged a significant glance with Natasha.

I cannot describe Alyosha's rapture at this new project. He was of a sudden completely comforted; his face beamed with joy, he embraced Natasha, kissed Katya's hands, embraced me. Natasha looked at him with a mournful smile, but Katya could not endure it. She threw me a feverish and flashing look, embraced Natasha, and got up to go. The Frenchwoman sent up a servant at that moment to tell Katya that the half-hour agreed upon was over and to request her to cut the interview short.

Natasha rose. The two stood facing one another, holding hands, and seemed trying to convey with their eyes all that was stored up in their souls.

"We shall never see each other again, shall we," said Katya.

"Never, Katya," answered Natasha.

"Well, then, let us say good-bye!"

They embraced each other.

"Do not curse me," Katya whispered hurriedly, "I'll . . . always . . . you may trust me . . . he shall be happy. . . . Come Alyosha, take me down!" she whispered hurriedly, clutching his arm.

"Vanya," Natasha said to me in agitation and distress when they had gone, "you go, too. . . and don't come back. Alyosha will be with me till the evening, till eight o'clock. But he can't stay later. I shall be left alone; come at about nine. Please do!"

When at nine o'clock, leaving Nellie with Alexandra Semyonovna (after the incident of the broken cup), I reached Natasha's, she was already alone and impatiently awaiting me. Mavra brought the samovar in. Natasha

poured me a cup of tea, sat down on the sofa and motioned me to come near her.

"Well, everything is over," she said, looking intently at me. Never shall I forget that look.

"So this is the end of our love. Six months of life! And for the rest of my life," she added, gripping my hands.

Her hand was burning. I tried to persuade her to put on something warm and go to bed.

"Presently, Vanya, presently, my dear friend. Let me talk and recall things a little. I feel all shattered . . . tomorrow I shall see him for the last time at ten o'clock, *for the last time!*"

"Natasha, you're unwell, fever will set in directly. . . . Do think of yourself."

"Well, I've been waiting for you now, Vanya, for this half-hour, since he went away, and what do you think I've been thinking about? What do you think I've been asking myself? I've been asking myself: did I love him? Or didn't I? And what was this love of ours? Why, do you think it's absurd, Vanya, that I should only be asking myself this now?"

"Don't upset yourself, Natasha."

"You see, Vanya, I have come to the conclusion that I didn't love him as an equal, the way a woman usually loves a man. I loved him like . . . almost like a mother. . . . I even imagine that there's no love in the world in which the two love one another as equals. What do you think?"

I looked at her with anxiety, and was afraid that it might be the beginning of brain-fever. Something seemed to draw her on; she felt a peculiar sort of compulsion to speak; some of her words were quite incoherent, and at times she even pronounced them indistinctly. I was very much alarmed.

"He was mine," she went on. "Almost from the first time I met him I had an overwhelming desire that he

should be *mine, mine* at once, and that he should not look at anyone, should not know anyone but me, me alone. . . . Katya expressed it very well this morning: I did love him as though I were always sorry for him . . . I always had an intense desire, a perfect agony of desire when I was alone that he should be happy, awfully happy. His face (you know the expression of his face, Vanya), I could not look at it calmly; *no one else* has such an expression, and when he laughed it made me turn cold and shudder. . . . Truly! . . .”

“Natasha, listen. . . .”

“People say about him . . . and you’ve said it too, that he has no will and that he’s . . . not very clever, like a child. But that’s what I loved in him more than anything. Would you believe it? I don’t know though, whether it was that I loved him for; I just simply loved him altogether, and if he’d been different in some way, if he’d had a will of his own or been cleverer, perhaps I shouldn’t have loved him so. Do you know, Vanya, I’ll confess something to you: do you remember we had a quarrel three months ago when he’d been to that—what’s her name—that Minna. . . . I found it out, I sleuthed on him, and would you believe it, it hurt me horribly, and yet I was somehow pleased too. I don’t know why . . . the very thought that he was amusing himself—or no, it’s not that—that he too, like a *grown-up man* together with other *grown ups*, visited the lovely ladies, that he too went to Minna’s! I . . . what bliss I got out of that quarrel; and then forgiving him . . . oh, my beloved!”

She looked into my face and laughed strangely. Then she seemed to fall into a reverie as though remembering still. And for a long time she sat like that with a smile on her face, thinking of the past.

“I loved forgiving him terribly, Vanya,” she went on. “Do you know when he left me alone I used to walk about the room, fretting and crying, and then it would occur

to me that the more he was at fault the better . . . yes! And do you know, I always picture him as a little boy. I am sitting in a chair and he lays his head on my knees and falls asleep, and I stroke his head softly and caress him. . . . I always pictured him like that when he was not with me. . . . I say, Vanya," she added suddenly, "what a darling Katya is!"

It seemed to me that she was deliberately lacerating her own wound, impelled to this by a sort of yearning, a yearning for despair and suffering. . . . And this so often happens when one has borne a grievous loss.

"Katya, I believe, can make him happy," she went on. "She has character and speaks with such conviction, and with him she's so grave and serious—and always talks to him about such clever things, as though she were grown up. And all the while she's a mere child herself! The little dear, the little dear! Oh, I hope they'll be happy! I hope so, I hope so!"

And her tears and sobs burst out in a torrent. It was quite half an hour before she could take a hold on herself and recovered some degree of self-control.

My sweet angel, Natasha! Even that evening, in spite of her own grief she was able to take an interest in others. I told her about Nellie, thinking to distract her, when I saw that she was a little calmer, or, rather wearied out. We parted late that evening. I stayed till she fell asleep, and as I went out I begged Mavra not to leave her suffering mistress's side all night.

"Oh . . . for the end of this misery!" I cried as I walked home. "To have it over soon! Whatever the end, but let it be soon!"

Next morning at nine o'clock precisely I was with her again. Alyosha arrived at the same time . . . to say good-bye. I will not describe this scene, I don't want to recall it. Natasha seemed to have resolved to control herself, to appear cheerful and unconcerned, but it was more than

she could do. She embraced Alyosha passionately, convulsively. She spoke little, but looked at him long and intently with a martyred and almost frantic gaze. She hung greedily on every word he uttered, and yet seemed to take in nothing of what he said. I remember he begged her to forgive him, to forgive him for this love of his, for all the injury he had done her during this time, to forgive his infidelities, his love for Katya, his departure . . . he spoke incoherently, tears choked him. Then he would suddenly begin to comfort her, saying that he was only going away for a month, or at the most five weeks, that he would be back in the summer, when they would be married, and that his father would give his consent, and above all that the day after tomorrow he would come back from Moscow, and they would have four whole days together again, so now they were only parting for one day.

It was strange! He himself fully believed in what he said, and that he would certainly return from Moscow in two days. Why then was he so miserable and tearful?

At last the clock struck eleven. It was with difficulty I persuaded him to go. The Moscow train was leaving at midday. There was only an hour left. Natasha told me herself afterwards that she did not remember how she had looked at him for the last time. I remember that she made the sign of the cross over him, kissed him, and hiding her face in her hands rushed back into the room, while I had to see Alyosha all the way downstairs to his carriage, or he would certainly have returned and never have gone down.

"You are our only hope," he said, as we went downstairs. "Vanya, my friend! I have injured you, and could never deserve your love, but be a brother to me to the end; love her, do not abandon her, write to me about everything, as fully as possible, write as tiny a hand as you can, so that the page should hold more. The day

after tomorrow I shall be here again for certain; for certain! But afterwards, when I go away, write to me!"

I helped him into his carriage.

"Till the day after tomorrow," he shouted to me as he drove off. "For certain!"

With a sinking heart I went upstairs, back to Natasha. She was standing in the middle of the room with her arms folded, and met me with a bewildered look, as though she didn't recognize me. Her coil of hair had fallen to one side; her eyes looked vacant and wandering. Mavra stood in the doorway gazing at her, panic-stricken.

Suddenly Natasha's eyes flashed.

"Ah! It's you! You!" she screamed at me. "Now you are the only one left! You hated him! You never could forgive him for my love. . . . Now you are with me again! What now? You've come to *comfort* me again, to persuade me to go back to my father, who cast me off and cursed me. I knew it would be so, yesterday, two months ago. . . . I don't want to, I won't. I curse them myself. . . . Go away! I can't bear the sight of you! Go away! Go away!"

I realized that she was frantic, and that the sight of me roused her anger to the point of madness, I realized that it was bound to be so, and thought it better to go. I sat down on the top stair outside and—waited. Now and again I got up, opened the door, beckoned to Mavra and questioned her. Mavra wept.

An hour and a half passed like this. I cannot describe what I went through in that time. My heart sank and ached with an intolerable pain. Suddenly the door opened and Natasha ran out with her cape and hat on. She seemed hardly conscious of her actions, and told me herself afterwards that she had but a dim memory of it, and did not know where she was running, or with what object.

Before I had time to jump up and hide myself, she suddenly saw me and froze to a standstill before me. "I remembered in a flash," she told me afterwards, "that in

my cruelty and madness I had actually driven you away, you, my friend, my brother, my saviour! And when I saw that you, my poor one, after being insulted by me had not gone away, but were sitting on the stairs, waiting till I should call you back—my God! if you only knew, Vanya, what I felt then! It was like a stab at my heart.”

“Vanya, Vanya!” she cried, holding out her hands to me. “You are here!”

And she fell into my arms.

I caught her up and carried her into the room. She had fainted! “What shall I do?” I thought. “She’ll have brain-fever, that’s certain!”

I decided to run for the doctor; something must be done to check the illness at the start. It would not take me long; my old German was usually at home till two o’clock. I flew to him, begging Mavra not for one minute, not for one second, to leave Natasha, and not to let her go out. The Lord helped me! A little later and I should not have found the old doctor at home. I met him when he was already in the street, just coming out of his house. Instantly I put him in my cab, before he had time to be surprised, and we hastened back to Natasha.

Yes, the Lord did help me! During the half-hour of my absence something had happened at Natasha’s which might have killed her outright if the doctor and I had not arrived in the nick of time. I had not been gone a quarter of an hour when Prince Valkovsky walked in. He had just been seeing the others off and had come to Natasha’s straight from the railway station. This visit had probably been planned and thought out by him long before. Natasha herself told me afterwards that for the first minute she was not even surprised to see the prince. “My brain was in a whirl,” she said.

He sat down opposite her, looking at her with a kindly and condoling expression.

“My dear,” he said with a sigh, “I understand your

grief; I knew how hard this moment would be, and so I considered it my duty to call on you. Seek consolation, if you can, in that at least that by renouncing Alyosha you have secured his happiness. But you understand this better than I, for you have found resolution for this generous action...."

"I sat and listened," Natasha told me, "but at first I really did not seem to understand him. I only remember that I stared and stared at him. He took my hand and began to press it in his. Evidently he found it very agreeable. I was so overwrought that I never thought of pulling my hand away."

"You realized," he went on, "that if you became Alyosha's wife he might come to hate you eventually, and you had sufficient pride to realize this, and resolve to ... but—I haven't come here to praise you, you know. I only wanted to tell you that you will never, anywhere, find a truer friend than me! I sympathize with you and pity you. I have been an unwilling participant in all this, but—I was only doing my duty. Your noble heart will understand and will make peace with mine.... But it has been harder for me than for you—believe me."

"Enough, prince," said Natasha, "leave me in peace."

"Certainly, I will go directly," he answered, "but I love you as though you were my own daughter, and you must allow me to come and see you. Look upon me now as your father and allow me to be of service to you."

"I want nothing. Leave me alone," Natasha interrupted again.

"I know you are proud. But I'm speaking sincerely, from my heart. What do you intend to do now? To make peace with your parents? That would be a good thing, but your father is unjust, proud and tyrannical; forgive me, but it is so. At home you would find nothing now but reproaches and fresh suffering. But you must be independent, and it is my obligation, my sacred duty to look after

you and help you now. Alyosha implored me not to leave you and to be a friend to you. But besides me there are others who are genuinely devoted to you. You will, I presume, allow me to present to you Count Nainsky. He has the best of hearts, he is a kinsman of ours, and I may even say has been the benefactor of our whole family. He has done a great deal for Alyosha. Alyosha has the greatest respect and affection for him. He is a very powerful man with great influence, far advanced in years, and it is quite permissible for you, an unmarried young lady, to receive him. I have told him about you already. He can help you, and if you wish it, find you an excellent position . . . with one of his relations. I gave him a full and straightforward account of *our affair* long ago, and he is so carried away with his kind and generous feeling that he himself now urges me to introduce him to you as soon as possible. He is a man who is responsive to everything that is beautiful, believe me—he is a generous old man, highly respected, able to recognize true worth, and who, in fact, quite recently acted in a most honourable manner towards your father in a certain case.”

Natasha jumped up as though she had been stung. Now, at last, she understood him.

“Leave me, leave me at once!” she shouted.

“But my dear friend, you are forgetting, the count may be of service to your father too.”

“My father will take nothing from you. Will you ever leave me?” Natasha shouted again.

“Oh, Lord, how impatient and mistrustful you are! What have I done to deserve this!” exclaimed the prince, looking about him with some uneasiness. “You will allow me in any case,” he went on, taking a large roll out of his pocket, “you will allow me to leave with you this proof of my sympathy, and especially the sympathy of Count Nainsky, on whose suggestion I am acting. This roll contains ten thousand rubles. Wait a moment, my

friend," he said hurriedly, seeing that Natasha had risen from her chair wrathfully. "Listen patiently to the end: you know your father lost his lawsuit. This ten thousand will serve as a compensation which...."

"Get out!" cried Natasha, "out with your money! I see right through you! Oh, base, base, base man!"

Prince Valkovsky got up from his chair, pale with rage.

He had probably come to see how the land lay, to survey the position, and no doubt was counting a great deal on the effect of the ten thousand rubles on Natasha, destitute, and abandoned by everyone. With his baseness and grossness he had on more than one occasion rendered services to Count Nainsky, a licentious old reprobate, in enterprises of the kind. But he hated Natasha, and realizing that his mission was not a success, he promptly changed his tone, and with spiteful joy hastened to insult her, that he might anyway *not have come for nothing*.

"Now, this won't do at all, my dear, that you are losing your temper so," he said in a voice that quivered slightly with impatience to enjoy the effect of his insult, "this won't do at all. You are offered protection and you turn up your little nose. Don't you realize that you ought to be grateful to me? I might have put you in a penitentiary long ago, as the father of the young man you were corrupting and fleecing, but I haven't done it, have I?" he ended with a horrid snicker.

We were coming in just then. Hearing the voices while still in the kitchen, I stopped the doctor for a second and listened to the prince's last words. They were followed by his loathsome chuckle and Natasha's despairing cry: "Oh, my God!" At that moment I opened the door and rushed at the prince.

I spat in his face, and slapped him on the cheek with all my might. He would have flung himself upon me, but on seeing that there were two of us he took to his heels, first snatching up the roll of notes from the table. Yes,

he did that; I saw it myself. I hurled a rolling-pin, which I picked up from the kitchen table, after him. . . . When I ran back into the room I saw the doctor holding Natasha, who was struggling frantically out of his arms as though in convulsions. We could not quieten her for a long time; at last we succeeded in getting her to bed; she was delirious; it looked very much like brain-fever.

"Doctor, what is it?" I asked, faint with fear.

"Wait a while," he answered, "I must watch the attack more closely and then form my conclusions . . . but I should say things are very bad. It may even end in brain-fever. However, we shall take measures. . . ."

A new idea had dawned upon me. I pleaded with the doctor to remain with Natasha for another two or three hours, and made him promise not to leave her for one minute. He promised and I ran home.

Nellie was sitting in a corner, morose and worried and glanced at me strangely. I must have looked strange myself.

I picked her up in my arms, sat down on the sofa, took her on my knee, and kissed her warmly. She flushed.

"Nellie, my angel!" I said to her, "would you like to be our salvation? Would you like to save us all?"

She looked at me in bewilderment.

"Nellie, you are our one hope now! There is a father, you've seen him and know him. He has cursed his daughter, and he came here yesterday to ask you to take his daughter's place. Now she, Natasha (and you said you loved her), has been abandoned by the man she loved, for whose sake she left her father. He's the son of that prince who came, do you remember, to see me one evening, and found you alone, and you ran away from him and were ill afterwards . . . you know him, don't you? He's a wicked man!"

"I know," said Nellie; she shuddered and blanched.

"Yes, he's a wicked man. He hated Natasha because

his son Alyosha wanted to marry her. Alyosha went away today, and an hour later his father was already at Natasha's, insulting her, threatening to put her in a penitentiary, and laughing at her. Do you understand me, Nellie?"

Her black eyes flashed, but she dropped them at once.

"I understand," she whispered, hardly audibly.

"Now Natasha is alone, and ill. I've left her with our doctor while I ran to you. Listen, Nellie, let us go to Natasha's father; you don't like him, you didn't want to go to him, but now let us go to him together. We'll go in and I'll tell them that you want to stay with them now and to take the place of their daughter, Natasha. The old man is ill, because he has cursed Natasha, and because Alyosha's father insulted him mortally again the other day. He won't even hear of his daughter now, but he loves her, he loves her, Nellie, and wants to make peace with her; I know it, I know it all! It is so! Do you hear, Nellie?"

"I do," she said in the same whisper.

I spoke to her with tears flooding my face. She threw timid glances at me.

"Do you believe it?"

"Yes."

"Well then, I'll go in with you, and they'll receive you, welcome you kindly and begin to question you. Then I'll turn the conversation so that they will question you about your past life; about your mother and your grandfather. Tell them, Nellie, everything, just as you told it to me. Tell them everything, simply, without keeping anything back. Tell them how your mother was abandoned by a wicked man, how she came to die in a cellar at Bubnova's, how your mother and you used to go about the streets begging, what she said, and what she asked you to do when she was dying.... Tell them about your grandfather too, how he wouldn't forgive your mother,

and how she sent you for him at the eleventh hour to come and forgive her, and how he refused . . . and how she died. Tell them everything, everything! And when you tell them all this, the old man will feel it all in his own heart, too. You see, he knows Alyosha has left her today and she is alone, humiliated and dishonoured, helpless and defenceless, at the mercy of her enemy. He knows all that. . . . Nellie, save Natasha! Will you go?"

"Yes," she answered, drawing a deep breath and looking at me with a strange prolonged gaze. There was something akin to reproach in that gaze, and I felt it in my heart.

But I could not give up my idea. I had too much faith in it. I grasped Nellie's hand and we went out. It was past two o'clock in the afternoon. A storm was coming on. For some days past the weather had been hot and stifling, but now we heard the first rumble of early spring thunder somewhere in the distance. The wind swept through the dusty streets.

We got into a cab. Nellie did not utter a word all the way, she only glanced up at me from time to time with the same strange and enigmatic look. Her bosom was heaving, and, holding her on the droshky, I felt against the palm of my hand the thumping of her little heart, which sounded as though it would leap out of her body.

CHAPTER VII

The way to the Ikhmenevs seemed endless to me. At last we arrived and I went in with a sinking feeling. I did not know what my leave-taking would be like, but I knew that at all costs I must not leave their house without having secured forgiveness and reconciliation.

It was by now past three. The old people were, as usual, sitting alone. Nikolai Sergeich was unnerved and

ill, and lay pale and exhausted, half reclining in his comfortable easy-chair, with a cold bandage round his head. Anna Andreyevna was sitting beside him, now and then moistening his temples with vinegar, and continually peeping into his face with a questioning and commiserating expression, which seemed to worry and even annoy the old man. He was obstinately silent, and she dared not speak. Our sudden arrival surprised them both. Anna Andreyevna, for some reason, took fright on seeing me with Nellie, and for the first minute looked at us as though she suddenly felt guilty of something.

"Here, I've brought you my Nellie," I said, walking in. "She has made up her mind, and now she has come to you of her own accord. Receive her and love her...."

The old man looked at me suspiciously, and this one look alone told me that he knew all, that is, that Natasha was now alone, deserted, abandoned, and by now perhaps insulted. He was very anxious to penetrate the mystery behind our arrival, and he looked inquiringly at both of us. Nellie was trembling, and, keeping a tight hold on my hand, she did not raise her eyes but only darted occasional frightened glances about her like a trapped little beast. But Anna Andreyevna soon recovered herself and rose to the occasion. She positively rushed to Nellie, kissed her, petted her, even cried over her, and tenderly made her sit beside her, keeping the child's hand in hers. Nellie looked at her askance with curiosity and even wonder.

But after fondling Nellie and making her sit beside her, the old lady did not know what to do next and shifted her eyes to me with naive expectation. The old man frowned, as if he suspected why I had brought Nellie. Aware that I noticed his ill-pleased mien and frown, he put his hand to his head and said:

"I've such a headache, Vanya."

We were still sitting in silence; I was considering how to begin. It was dusky in the room, a black storm-cloud

was coming over the sky, and once again we heard a rumble of thunder in the distance.

"Hear the thunder; it's early this spring," said the old man. "But I remember in '37, at home, there were thunder-storms even earlier."

Anna Andreyevna sighed.

"Perhaps we should have some tea?" she asked timidly, but no one answered, and she turned to Nellie again.

"What is your name, my dear?" she asked.

Nellie uttered her name in a faint voice, and cast her eyes down lower than ever. The old man looked at her intently.

"It's Yelena, isn't it?" Anna Andreyevna went on with more animation.

"Yes," answered Nellie.

And again a moment of silence followed.

"Praskovya Andreyevna, my sister-in-law, had a niece called Yelena; they used to call her Nellie, too, I remember," observed Nikolai Sergeich.

"And have you no relations, my dear, neither father nor mother?" Anna Andreyevna asked again.

"No," Nellie whispered timidly and jerkily.

"I'd heard so, so I had heard. And is it long since your mother died?"

"No, not long."

"Poor darling, poor little orphan," Anna Andreyevna went on, looking at her compassionately.

The old man was impatiently drumming on the table with his fingers.

"Your mother was a foreigner, wasn't she? Is that what you told me, Ivan Petrovich?" the old lady continued her timid questioning.

Nellie shot a glance at me out of her black eyes, as though calling me to her aid. Her breathing was somewhat laboured and irregular.

"Her mother was the daughter of an Englishman and a

Russian woman; so she was sooner a Russian, Anna Andreyevna. But Nellie was born abroad."

"But why did her mother go and live abroad with her husband?"

Nellie suddenly flushed crimson. The old lady guessed at once that she had blundered, and started under a wrathful glance from her husband. He looked at her severely and turned away to the window.

"Her mother was deceived by a base and evil man," he spoke, suddenly addressing Anna Andreyevna. "She left her father with him, and gave her father's money into her lover's keeping; he cheated her out of it all, took her abroad, robbed and deserted her. A good friend remained true to her and helped her up to the time of his death. And when he died she came back to Russia, to her father two years ago. Isn't that what you told me, Vanya?" he asked me abruptly.

Nellie got up in great agitation, and started towards the door.

"Come here, Nellie," said the old man, holding out his hand to her at last. "Sit here, sit beside me, here, sit down."

He bent down, kissed her on the forehead, and began softly stroking her head. Nellie trembled all over, but she controlled herself. Anna Andreyevna moved and joyfully expectant watched her Nikolai Sergeich showing tenderness to the orphan at last.

"I know, Nellie, that a wicked man, a wicked, unprincipled man ruined your mother, but I know, too, that she loved and honoured her father," the old man, still stroking Nellie's head, brought out with some excitement, unable to resist throwing down this challenge to us. A faint flush suffused his pale cheeks, but he avoided our eyes.

"Mamma loved Grandfather better than he loved her," Nellie asserted timidly but firmly, also trying to avoid looking at anyone.

"And how do you know?" the old man asked sharply, with a childish lack of control and apparently ashamed of his impatience.

"I know," Nellie answered curtly. "He would not receive Mamma, and . . . drove her away. . . ."

I saw that Nikolai Sergeich was on the point of saying something, making some retort such as that the father had good reason not to receive her, but he glanced at us and held it back.

"Why, where did you go to live when your grandfather wouldn't receive you?" asked Anna Andreyevna, who showed a sudden obstinacy and desire to pursue the subject.

"When we arrived we spent a long while looking for Grandfather," answered Nellie, "but we couldn't find him. That's when Mamma told me that Grandfather had once been rich, and wanted to build a factory, but that now he was very poor because the man Mamma went away with had taken all Grandfather's money from her and wouldn't give it back. She told me that herself."

"Hm!" the old man responded with a grunt.

"And she told me, too," Nellie went on, growing more and more animated, and obviously anxious to answer Nikolai Sergeich, though she addressed Anna Andreyevna, "she told me that Grandfather was very angry with her, and that she had behaved very wrongly to him; and that now she had no one in the whole world but Grandfather. And when she told me this she cried. . . . 'He will not forgive me,' she said when we were on our way here, 'but perhaps he will see you and love you, and for your sake he will forgive me.' Mamma loved me very much, and she always kissed me when she said this, but she was very much afraid of going to Grandfather. She taught me to pray for Grandfather, and she used to pray herself, and she told me a great deal of how she had lived with Grandfather before, and how Grandfather loved her,

more than anyone. She used to play the piano to him and read to him in the evenings, and Grandfather kissed her and gave her lots of presents. He used to give her everything, and that's why they quarrelled once on Mother's birthday, because Grandfather thought Mamma didn't know what his present would be, but Mamma had found out long before. Mamma wanted earrings and Grandfather tried to deceive her and told her it was going to be a brooch, not earrings; and when he gave her the earrings and saw that Mamma had known all along it wasn't going to be a brooch, he was angry that Mamma had found out and wouldn't speak to her for half the day, but afterwards he came himself to kiss her and ask her forgiveness."

Nellie was carried away by her story, and there was even a flush of colour on her pale, wan cheeks.

It was evident that more than once in their corner in the basement the *mother* had talked to her little Nellie of her happy days in the past, embracing and kissing the little girl who was all that was left to her in life, and weeping over her, never suspecting what a powerful effect these stories had on the frail child's morbid and prematurely developed imagination.

But Nellie seemed suddenly to check herself. She looked suspiciously around and was mute again. The old man frowned and drummed on the table again. A tear glistened in Anna Andreyevna's eye, and she silently wiped it away with her handkerchief.

"Mamma was very ill when we came here," Nellie went on in a low voice. "Her chest was very bad. We were looking for Grandfather a long time and we couldn't find him; and we rented a corner in a basement room."

"A corner! And her so sick!" cried Anna Andreyevna.

"Yes . . . a corner . . ." answered Nellie. "Mamma was poor. Mamma used to tell me," she added with growing

earnestness, "that it's no sin to be poor, but it's a sin to be rich and hurt people, and that God was punishing her."

"Was it in Vasilyevsky Island you lodged? At Bubnova's, was it?" the old man asked, turning to me, and trying to throw a note of unconcern into his question. He spoke as though he felt it awkward to remain silent.

"No, not there. At first it was in Meshchanskaya Street," Nellie answered. "It was very dark and damp there," she went on after a pause, "and Mamma got very ill there, though she wasn't always in bed then. I used to wash the clothes for her, and she would cry. There used to be an old woman living there, too, the widow of a captain; and there was a retired clerk, and he always came in drunk, he shouted and quarrelled every night. I was terribly afraid of him. Mamma used to take me into her bed and hug me, and she herself trembled all over while he shouted and swore. Once he tried to beat the captain's widow, and she was a very old lady and walked with a stick. Mamma was sorry for her, and she stood up for her; the man then hit Mamma, and I hit him."

Nellie stopped. The memory agitated her; her eyes were blazing.

"Good heavens!" cried Anna Andreyevna, entirely absorbed in the story and keeping her eyes fastened upon Nellie, who addressed her principally.

"Then Mamma went out," Nellie continued, "and took me with her. That was in the daytime. We walked and walked about the streets till it was quite dark, and Mamma walked and cried all the time, and led me by my hand. I was very tired. We had nothing to eat that day. And Mamma kept talking to herself and saying to me: 'Be poor, Nellie, and when I die don't listen to anyone or anything. Don't go to anyone, be alone and poor,

and work, and if you can't get work beg alms, but don't go to *them!*' It was already dusk and we were crossing a wide street when suddenly Mamma cried out, 'Azorka! Azorka!' And a big hairless dog ran up to Mother, whining and jumping up to her, and Mamma was frightened, she turned pale, cried out, and fell on her knees before a tall old man, who walked with a stick, looking at the ground. And this tall old man was Grandfather, and he was so skinny and in such poor clothes. That was the first time I saw Grandfather. Grandfather was very much frightened, too, and turned very pale, and when he saw Mamma lying at his feet, hugging his knees, he tore himself away, pushed Mamma, struck the pavement with his stick, and walked quickly away from us. Azorka stayed behind and kept whining and licking Mamma, and then ran after Grandfather, seized him by his coat-tail and tried to pull him back, but Grandfather hit him with his stick. Azorka turned to run back to us, but Grandfather called to him so he ran after Grandfather and whined and whined. And Mamma lay as though she were dead; a crowd collected and the police came. I kept screaming and trying to get Mother up. She did get up, looked round her, and followed me. I led her home. People followed us with their eyes for a long while and kept shaking their heads."

Nellie paused for breath and further effort. She was very pale, but there was a gleam of determination in her eyes. It was evident that she had made up her mind at last to tell *all*. There was even something defiant about her at this moment.

"Well," observed Nikolai Sergeich in an unsteady voice, with an irritable harshness. "Well, your mother had injured her father, and he had reason to repulse her...."

"Mamma used to say that, too," Nellie broke in abruptly, "and as we walked home she kept saying: 'That's your grandfather, Nellie, and I sinned against him; that's why

he cursed me, and God is punishing me for it now!' And all that evening and all the following days she went on saying this. And she talked as though she didn't know what she was saying."

The old man made no comment.

"And afterwards how was it you moved into another lodging?" asked Anna Andreyevna, who wept quietly all the while.

"That very night Mamma fell ill, and the captain's widow found a lodging at Bubnova's, and two days later we moved, and the captain's widow with us; and after we'd moved Mamma was quite ill and in bed for three weeks, and I looked after her. All our money had gone, and we were helped by the captain's widow and Ivan Alexandrich."

"The coffin-maker, where they lived," I explained.

"And when Mamma got up and began to go about she told me all about Azorka."

Nellie paused. The old man seemed relieved that the conversation had turned to the dog.

"Well, what did she tell you about Azorka?" he asked, bending lower in his chair, as though he would hide his face more completely and looked downward.

"She kept talking to me about Grandfather," answered Nellie; "and when she was ill she kept talking about him and she talked about him in her delirium, too. When she began to recover she started telling me again how she used to live before . . . that's when she told me about Azorka: she once saw some horrid boys dragging Azorka along on a rope to drown him in the river outside the town, and Mamma gave them some money and bought Azorka. And when Grandfather saw Azorka he laughed at him very much. But Azorka ran away. Mamma began to cry; Grandfather was frightened and promised a hundred rubles to anyone who would bring Azorka back. Azorka was brought back on the third day. Grandfather

paid the hundred rubles, and from that time he began to love Azorka. And Mamma was so fond of him that she even used to take him to bed with her. She told me that Azorka used to belong to some street actors; he knew how to sit up, and used to have a monkey riding on his back, and he did rifle drill and knew lots of other tricks. And when Mamma went away, Grandfather kept Azorka with him and always went out with him, so that the minute Mamma saw Azorka in the street she guessed that Grandfather must be close by too."

This was evidently not what the old man had expected to hear about Azorka, and he scowled more and more. He did not ask any more questions.

"So you didn't see your grandfather again, did you?" asked Anna Andreyevna.

"Yes, when Mamma had begun to get better I met Grandfather again. I was on my way to the shop to get some bread; suddenly I saw a man with Azorka, I looked closer and saw it was Grandfather. I stepped aside and squeezed up against the wall. Grandfather looked at me; he looked so hard at me and was so frightening that I was awfully scared of him, and he walked by. But Azorka remembered me, and began to jump about me and lick my hands. I hurried home, looked back, and saw Grandfather go into the shop. Then I thought: 'he's probably asking about us,' and I was more frightened than ever, and when I got home I said nothing to Mamma for fear she should be ill again. I didn't go to the shop next day; I said I had a headache; and when I went the day after that I met no one, but I was terribly frightened so I ran all the way. But a day later I'd hardly got round the corner when there was Grandfather before me with Azorka. I ran and turned into another street and went to the shop a different way; but suddenly I came right up against him again, and was so frightened that I stood quite still and couldn't move. Grandfather stopped before me and

again stared long at me and then he patted me on the head, took my hand and led me along, while Azorka followed behind wagging his tail. Here I saw that Grandfather couldn't walk properly any more, but kept leaning on his stick, and his hands were quite shaky. He took me to a street vendor who sold gingerbread and apples on the street corner. Grandfather bought a gingerbread cock and a fish, and one sweet, and an apple; and when he was taking the money out of his leather purse, his hands shook dreadfully and he dropped a five kopek piece, and I picked it up for him. He gave it to me and the gingerbread too, and stroked my head; but still he said nothing and walked away.

"Then I came home to Mamma and told her all about Grandfather, and how frightened I had been of him at first and had hidden from him. Mamma wouldn't believe me, but afterwards she was so delighted that she asked me questions all the evening, kissed me and cried, and when there was nothing more to tell she said to me that in future I should not be afraid of him, and that Grandfather must love me since he came specially to see me. And she told me to be nice to Grandfather and to talk to him. And next day she sent me out several times in the morning, though I told her that Grandfather always came in the evening. She herself followed me at a distance, hiding behind corners, and the next day, too, but Grandfather didn't come; and it rained those days, and Mamma caught a bad cold because she was always coming out with me, and took to her bed again.

"Grandfather came a week later, and again bought me a gingerbread fish and an apple, and said nothing that time either. And when he walked away I followed him stealthily, because I had made up my mind beforehand that I'd find out where Grandfather lived and tell Mamma. I kept at a distance on the other side of the street so that Grandfather wouldn't see me. And he lived very far

away, not where he lived afterwards and died, but in another big house in Gorokhovaya Street, on the fourth storey. I found it all out, and it was late when I got home. Mother was awfully worried, because she didn't know where I was. But when I told her she was delighted again and wanted to go and see Grandfather the very next day; but the next day she became afraid and could not make up her mind, and went on being afraid for three whole days, so she didn't go at all. And then she called me and said: 'Look here, Nellie, I'm ill now and can't go, but I've written a letter to your grandfather; go to him and give him the letter. And Nellie, watch him read it, and see what he says, and what he does; go down on your knees and kiss him and beg him to forgive your mother!' And Mamma cried dreadfully and kept kissing me, and blessing me on my way and praying; and she made me kneel down with her before the icon, and though she was very ill she took me as far as the gate, and when I looked round she was still standing watching me go. . . .

"I came to Grandfather's and opened the door; the door had no latch. Grandfather was sitting at the table eating bread and potatoes, and Azorka stood watching him eat and wagging his tail. In that lodging, too, the windows were low and dark, and there was also only one table and one chair. And he lived alone. I went in, and he was so frightened that he turned white and began to tremble. I was frightened, too, and didn't say a word, I only went up to the table and put down the letter. When Grandfather saw the latter he got so angry that he jumped up, lifted his stick as if to hit me with it; but he didn't hit me, he only led me into the passage and pushed me. Before I had got down the first flight of stairs he opened the door again and threw the unopened letter after me. I went home and told Mamma all about it. Then Mamma was ill in bed again. . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

At that moment there was a rather loud peal of thunder, and heavy raindrops pattered on the window-panes. The room grew dark. Anna Andreyevna looked up fearfully and crossed herself. We all started.

"It will soon be over," said the old man, looking towards the window. Then he got up and began walking up and down the room. Nellie watched him from the corner of her eyes. She was in a state of extreme, feverish excitement. I could see it, although she avoided looking at me.

"Well, what happened then?" asked the old man, settling down in his easy-chair again.

Nellie looked round timidly.

"So you didn't see your grandfather any more?"

"Yes, I did."

"You did! Tell us, my dear, tell us," Anna Andreyevna put in hastily.

"I didn't see him for three weeks," said Nellie, "not till it was quite winter. It was winter then and the snow had fallen. When I met Grandfather again at the same place I was awfully glad . . . for Mamma was grieving that he didn't come. When I saw him I ran to the other side of the street on purpose so that he might see I was running away from him. And as I looked round I saw Grandfather first walk quickly after me, then he broke into a run to overtake me, and began calling out to me: 'Nellie, Nellie!' And Azorka was running after him. I felt sorry for him and I stopped. Grandfather came up, took me by the hand and led me along, and when he saw I was crying, he stood still, looked at me, bent down and kissed me. Then he saw that my shoes were torn, and he asked me if I had no others. I told him promptly that Mamma had no money at all, and that the people we lodged with gave us food out of sheer pity. Grandfather said nothing, but he took me to the market and bought

me some shoes and told me to put them on at once, and then he took me home with him, but first he went into a shop and bought a cake and two sweets, and when we arrived he told me to eat the cake, and watched me eat it, and then gave me the sweets. And Azorka put his paws on the table and asked for some cake, too; I gave him some, and Grandfather laughed. Then he made me stand beside him, began stroking my head, and asked me whether I had ever had any schooling. I told him, and he said that I should come whenever I could at three o'clock in the afternoon, and that he would teach me himself. Then he told me to turn away and look out of the window until he told me to look round again. I did as he said, but I peeped round and saw him unpick a corner of his pillow, and take out four rubles. Then he brought the money to me and said: 'That's for you alone.' I was going to take it, but then I changed my mind and said: 'If it's for me alone I won't take it.' Grandfather was suddenly angry, and said to me: 'Well, take it any way you please and go away.' I went away, and he didn't kiss me.

"When I got home I told Mamma everything. And Mamma was growing worse and worse. A medical student used to come and see the coffin-maker; he treated Mamma and told her to take some medicine.

"I used to go and see Grandfather often. Mamma wanted me to. Grandfather bought a New Testament and a geography book, and began to teach me; and sometimes he would tell me what countries there are in the world, and what sort of people live in them, and about all the seas, and how it used to be in olden times, and how Christ forgave us all. When I asked him questions myself he was very pleased, and so I often asked him questions, and he would tell me things, and he talked a lot about God. And sometimes we didn't have lessons, but played with Azorka. Azorka grew very fond of me

and I taught him to jump over a stick and Grandfather laughed and patted me on the head. Only Grandfather did not often laugh. One time he would talk a great deal, and then he would not utter a word and would sit still, as if he had fallen asleep, but with his eyes open. And he would sit like that till it was dark, and when it was dark he would become so terrible, so old. . . . Or I'd come and find him sitting in his chair thinking, and he'd hear nothing; and Azorka would be lying near him. I would wait and wait and cough; but still Grandfather wouldn't look round. And so I'd go away. And at home Mamma would be waiting for me. She'd be lying in bed, and I would tell her everything, everything, it would be night and I'd still be talking and she'd still be listening about Grandfather: what he'd done that day, and what he'd said to me, the stories he had told and the lessons he'd given me. And when I told her how I'd made Azorka jump over a stick and how Grandfather had laughed, she suddenly laughed, too, and she would laugh and be happy for a long time and make me repeat it again and then begin to pray. And I was always thinking: why does Mamma love Grandfather so much and Grandfather doesn't love her at all, and when I went to Grandfather's I told him on purpose how much Mamma loved him. He listened, looking so angry, but still he listened and didn't say a word. Then I asked him why Mamma loved him so much that she was always asking about him, while he never asked about Mamma. Grandfather flared up and turned me out of the room. I stood outside the door for a little while, and he suddenly opened the door and called me in again, and still he was angry and silent. And afterwards when we began reading the Gospel I asked him again why Jesus Christ said: 'Love one another and forgive those who trespass against you' and yet he didn't want to forgive Mamma. Then he jumped up and shouted that Mamma had taught me to

say that, pushed me out of his room and told me never to dare come and see him any more. And I said that I didn't want to come and see him any more myself, and went away.... And next day Grandfather moved from his lodgings...."

"I said the rain would soon be over; and see, it is over, the sun's come out ... look, Vanya," said Nikolai Sergeich, turning to the window.

Anna Andreyevna turned to him with astonishment, and suddenly there was a flash of indignation in the eyes of the old lady, who had always been so meek and overawed. Silently she took Nellie's hand and sat her on her knee.

"Tell me, my angel," she said, "I will listen to you. Let those whose hearts are callous...."

She did not finish and burst into tears. Nellie glanced questioningly at me, as though in alarm and dismay. The old man looked at me, shrugged his shoulders, but at once turned away.

"Go on, Nellie," I said.

"For three days I didn't go to Grandfather," Nellie began again; "and during that time Mamma got worse. All our money was gone and we had nothing to buy medicine with, and we had to go hungry, too, because the coffin-maker and his wife had nothing themselves, and they began to scold us for living at their expense. Then on the morning of the third day I got up and began dressing to go out. Mamma asked where I was going. I said to Grandfather to ask for money, and she was glad, for I had already told Mamma how he had turned me out, and had told her that I didn't want to go to him again, although she cried and tried to persuade me to go. When I got there I found out that Grandfather had moved, so I went to look for him at the new address. As soon as I went in to him in his new lodging he jumped up, rushed at me and stamped his feet; I told him at once

that Mamma was very ill, that we needed some money for her medicine, fifty kopeks, and that we had nothing to eat. . . . Grandfather shouted and pushed me out on to the stairs and latched the door behind me. But while he was pushing me I told him I'd sit on the stairs and not go away until he gave me the money. And I sat down on the stairs. In a little while he opened the door, saw me sitting there and shut it again. Then after a long time he opened it again, saw me and shut it again. And after that he opened it and looked out many times. At last he came out with Azorka, locked the door and passed by me without saying a word. And I didn't say a word, either, but went on sitting there and sat there till it got dark."

"My darling!" cried Anna Andreyevna, "but it must have been so cold on the staircase!"

"I had a warm coat," Nellie answered.

"A coat, indeed! Poor darling, what miseries you've been through! What did he do then, your grandfather?"

Nellie's lips began to quiver, but she made a tremendous effort and controlled herself.

"He came back when it was quite dark, and stumbled against me as he came up, and cried out: 'Who is it?' I said it was I. He must have thought I'd gone away long ago, and when he saw I was still there he was very much surprised and for a long while he stood still before me. Suddenly he hit the steps with his stick, ran and opened his door, and a minute later brought me out some coppers and threw them at me on the stairs.

" 'Here, take that!' he shouted. 'That's all I have, take it and tell your mother that I curse her.' And he slammed the door. The coppers rolled down the stairs. I began picking them up in the dark, and Grandfather must have understood that he'd thrown the coppers about on the stairs, and that it was difficult for me to find them in the dark; he opened the door and brought out a candle,

and by candlelight I soon picked them up. And Grandfather himself looked for them with me, and told me that there must be seventy kopeks altogether, and then he went away. When I got home I gave Mamma the money and told her everything; and Mother grew worse, and I was ill all night myself and next day, too, I was all in a fever. But I had only one thought in my head because I was angry with Grandfather, and when Mother fell asleep I went out into the street and walked towards his lodging, but some distance from it I stopped on the bridge. Then *he* passed by...."

"Arkhipov," I said, "The man I told you about, Nikolai Sergeich—the man who was with the young merchant at Bubnova's and who got a beating there. That was the first time Nellie saw him.... Go on, Nellie."

"I stopped him and asked him for some money, a silver ruble. He said: 'A silver ruble?' I said: 'Yes.' Then he laughed and said: 'Come with me.' I didn't know whether to go or not, when suddenly an old man in gold-rimmed spectacles came up—he heard me ask for the silver ruble. He bent down to me and asked why I had to have exactly that. I told him that Mamma was ill and that we needed that much for medicine. He asked where we lived and wrote down the address, and gave me a ruble note. And when the other man saw the gentleman in spectacles he walked away and didn't ask me to come with him any more. I went into a shop and changed the ruble. Thirty kopeks I wrapped up in paper and put apart for Mamma, and seventy kopeks I didn't put in paper, but held tight in my hand on purpose and went to Grandfather's. When I got there I opened the door, stopped in the doorway, and threw all the money into the room, and it went rolling about the floor.

"'There, take your money!' I said to him. 'Mamma won't take it from you since you curse her.' Then I slammed the door and ran away at once."

Her eyes flashed, and she looked with naive defiance at the old man.

"Quite right, too," said Anna Andreyevna, not looking at Nikolai Sergeich, and holding Nellie tight in her arms. "It served him right. Your grandfather was wicked and cruel-hearted."

"Hm!" responded Nikolai Sergeich.

"Well, what then, what then?" Anna Andreyevna asked impatiently.

"I stopped going to see Grandfather and he gave up coming to meet me," said Nellie.

"Well, how did you live then—your mother and you? Ah, poor things, poor things!"

"And Mamma got worse still, and she hardly ever got up." Nellie went on, and her voice quivered and broke. "We had no more money, and I began to go out with the captain's widow. She used to go from house to house, and also stop good people in the street, begging; that was how she lived. She used to tell me she wasn't a beggar, that she had papers to show her rank, and to show that she was poor, too. She used to show these papers, and that's why people gave her money. It was she who told me that it wasn't shameful to beg from all. I used to go out with her, and we were given alms, and that's how we lived. Mamma found out about it because the other lodgers began to call her a beggar, and Bubnova herself came to Mamma and said she'd better let me go to her instead of begging in the street. She'd been to see Mamma before too and brought her money, and when Mamma wouldn't take it from her she said why was she so proud, and sent us things to eat. And when she said this about me Mamma was frightened and cried; and Bubnova began to swear at her, for she was drunk, and told her that I was a beggar anyway and went begging with the captain's widow; and that same evening she turned the captain's widow out of the

house. When Mother learnt it all she began to cry; then she suddenly got out of bed, dressed, took me by the hand and led me out with her. Ivan Alexandrich tried to stop her, but she wouldn't listen to him, and we went out. Mamma could scarcely walk, and had to sit down every minute or two, and I supported her. Mamma kept saying that she was going to Grandfather's and that I was to take her there, and by then it was quite dark. Suddenly we came to a big street; a lot of carriages were driving up to one of the houses, and a great many people were getting out; there were lights in all the windows and we could hear music. Mamma stopped, clutched my arm, and said to me then, 'Nellie, be poor, be poor all your life; don't go to them whoever may call you, whoever may come to you. You could have been there too, rich and finely dressed, but I don't want it. They are cruel and wicked, and this is what I bid you: remain poor, work, and even beg alms, but if anyone comes for you say: "I won't go with you!"' That's what Mamma said to me when she was ill, and I want to obey her all my life," Nellie added, quivering with emotion, her little face flushed; "and I'll work and be a servant all my life, and I've come to you, too, to work and be a servant, and I don't want to be like a daughter."

"Hush, hush, my darling, hush!" cried Anna Andreyevna clasping Nellie warmly. "Your Mamma was ill, you know, when she said that."

"She was out of her mind," said the old man sharply.

"What if she was!" cried Nellie, turning abruptly to him. "Even if she was out of her mind she told me so, and I shall obey her all my life. And when she said that to me she fell down fainting."

"Merciful heavens!" cried Anna Andreyevna. "Ill, out in the street, in winter!"

"They would have taken us to the police, but a gentleman said a word for us, asked me our address, gave me

ten rubles, and told them to drive Mamma to our lodging in his carriage. Mamma never got up again after that, and three weeks later she died."

"And her father? He didn't forgive her to the end?" gasped Anna Andreyevna.

"He didn't!" answered Nellie, mastering herself with a painful effort. "A week before she died Mamma called me to her and said: 'Nellie, go once more to your grandfather, the last time, and ask him to come to me and forgive me. Tell him I shall be dead in a few days, and that I'm leaving you all alone in the world. And tell him, too, that it's hard for me to die like that....' I went. I knocked at Grandfather's door, he opened it, and as soon as he saw me he wanted to shut it in my face, but I seized the door with both hands and cried out to him:

"'Mamma's dying, she's asking for you; come!' But he pushed me away and slammed the door. I came back to Mamma, lay down beside her, hugged her in my arms and did not say anything. Mother hugged me, too, and asked no questions."

At this point Nikolai Sergeich leant his hand heavily on the table and stood up, but after looking at us all with strange, lustreless eyes, he sank back into his easy-chair as if in exhaustion. Anna Andreyevna no longer looked at him. She was sobbing over Nellie.

"The last day before Mamma died, towards evening she called me to her, took me by the hand and said:

"'I shall die today, Nellie.'

"She wanted to say something else, but she could no longer talk. I looked at her, but she seemed not to see me any longer, she just held my hand tight in hers. I softly pulled my hand away and ran out of the house, and ran all the way to Grandfather's. When he saw me he jumped up from his chair and stared at me, and he was so frightened that he turned quite pale and trembled. I seized his hand and only said:

“ ‘She’s dying.’

“Then all of a sudden he grew flustered, he picked up his stick and ran after me; he even forgot his hat, though it was cold. I grabbed his hat and put it on his head, and we ran off together. I hurried him and told him to take a cab because Mamma would die any minute, but Grandfather only had seven kopeks, all in all. He stopped several cabs, and haggled with them, but they only laughed at him and laughed at Azorka; Azorka was running with us, and we all ran on and on. Grandfather was tired and breathing hard, but he still hurried on and ran. Suddenly he fell down, and his hat flew off. I helped him up and put his hat on again, and led him by the hand, and we only got home towards nightfall. But Mamma was already dead. When Grandfather saw her he flung up his hands, trembled, and stood over her numbly. Then I went up to my dead mother, seized Grandfather’s hand and shouted to him:

“ ‘There, you wicked, cruel man. There! Look!... Look!’

“Then Grandfather let out a shriek and fell down as though he were dead....”

Nellie jumped up, freed herself from Anna Andreyevna’s arms, and stood in the midst of us, pale, exhausted, and terrified. But Anna Andreyevna flew to her, and embracing her again cried as though she were inspired.

“I, I’ll be a mother to you now, Nellie, and you shall be my child. Yes, Nellie, let us go, let us leave all of them, cruel and wicked.... Let them mock and jeer at people; God will requite them. Come, Nellie, come away from here, come!”

I have never, before or since, seen her so agitated, and I had never thought her capable of such emotion. Nikolai Sergeich straightened up in his chair, stood up, and asked, with a break in his voice:

“Where are you going, Anna Andreyevna?”

"To her, to my daughter, to Natasha!" she shouted, drawing Nellie after her to the door.

"Listen, listen; wait!"

"I won't wait, you cruel, you wicked man! I have waited too long, and she has waited too, but now, good-bye!..."

With this, Anna Andreyevna turned back, glanced at her husband, and stopped petrified: Nikolai Sergeich stood before her clutching his hat, and with feeble, trembling hands was hastily pulling on his coat.

"You, too! ... You're coming with me, too!" she cried, clasping her hands in supplication, looking at him incredulously as though she dared not believe in such happiness.

"Natasha! Where is my Natasha? Where is she? Where's my daughter?" tore through at last from the old man's heart. "Give me back my Natasha! Where, where is she?"

And seizing his stick, which I handed him, he rushed to the door.

"He has forgiven! Forgiven!" cried Anna Andreyevna.

But the old man did not get to the threshold. The door opened quickly and Natasha ran into the room, pale, with flashing eyes as though she were in a fever. Her dress was crumpled and soaked with rain. The kerchief with which she had covered her head had slipped back, and her thick, disordered hair glistened with big raindrops. She ran in, saw her father, and with a cry, fell on her knees before him, with outstretched arms.

CHAPTER IX

But he was already holding her in his arms!

He lifted her up like a child and carried her to his chair, sat her down, and fell on his knees before her. He kissed her hands and her feet, he hastened to kiss

her, hastened to gaze at her as though he could not yet believe that she was with him, that he saw and heard her again—his daughter, his Natasha. Anna Andreyevna embraced her, sobbing, pressed her head to her bosom and remained motionless in this embrace, unable to utter a word.

"My dear!... My life!... My joy!..." the old man exclaimed incoherently, clasping Natasha's hands and gazing like a lover at her pale, thin, but lovely face, and into her eyes which glistened with tears. "My joy, my child!" he repeated, and paused again, and gazed at her with reverential rapture. "Why, why did you tell me she had grown thinner?" he asked, turning to us with a hurried, childlike smile, but still on his knees before her. "She's thin, it's true, she's pale, but look how pretty she is! Lovelier than she used to be, yes, even lovelier!" he added, growing speechless with anguish, joyful anguish, which seemed to rend his heart in two.

"Get up, Papa! Oh, do get up," said Natasha. "I want to kiss you, too...."

"Oh, the darling! Did you hear, Annushka, did you hear how sweetly she said that?"

And he embraced her convulsively.

"No, Natasha, it's for me, for me to lie at your feet, till my heart tells me that you've forgiven me, for I can never, never deserve your forgiveness now! I cast you off, I cursed you; do you hear me, Natasha, I cursed you! And I was capable of that!... And you, you, Natasha, could you believe that I had cursed you? You did believe it, yes, you did! You shouldn't have believed it! You shouldn't have believed it, you simply shouldn't! Cruel little heart! Why didn't you come to me? You knew how I should receive you, didn't you.... Oh, Natasha, you must remember how I used to love you! Well, now and all this time I've loved you twice as much, a thousand times as much as before. I've loved you with every drop

of my blood. I would have torn my bleeding heart out, torn it into shreds and laid it at your feet. Oh! my joy!"

"Well, kiss me then, you cruel man, kiss me on my lips, on my face, as Mamma kisses me!" exclaimed Natasha in a faint, weak voice, full of joyful tears.

"And on your dear eyes, too! Your dear eyes! As I used to, do you remember?" repeated the old man after a long, sweet embrace. "Oh, Natasha! Did you sometimes dream of us? And I dreamt of you almost every night, and every night you came to me and I cried over you. And once you came to me as a little child, as you were when you were ten years old and were just beginning to have music lessons, do you remember? You came in a short frock, with pretty little shoes on, and red little hands . . . her hands used to be so red, do you remember, Annushka? You came up to me, sat on my knee and put your arms round me. . . . And you, you bad girl! You could believe I cursed you, that I wouldn't have welcomed you if you'd come? Why, I . . . listen, Natasha, why, I often went to see you, and your mother didn't know, and no one knew; sometimes I'd stand under your windows, sometimes I'd wait half a day, somewhere on the pavement near your gate, all for the sake of seeing you from afar if you chanced to come out! Often in the evening there would be a candle burning on your window-sill; how often I went to your house, Natasha, if only to look at your light, if only to see your shadow on the window-pane, to bless you for the night. And did you bless me for the night, did you think of me? Did your heart tell you that I was below the window? And how often in the winter I went up your stairs, late at night and stood on the dark landing listening at your door, hoping to hear your voice, to catch a sound of your laughter. Me curse you? Why, the other day I came to you; I wanted to forgive you, and only turned back at the very door. . . . Oh, Natasha!"

He stood up, raised her out of the chair and held her close to his heart.

"She is here, near my heart again!" he cried. "Oh Lord, I thank Thee for all, for all, for Thy wrath and for Thy mercy! . . . And for Thy sun which is shining upon us again after the storm! For all this minute I thank Thee! Oh, we may be insulted and humiliated, but we're together again, and let the proud and the haughty who have insulted and humiliated us triumph now! Let them throw stones at us! Have no fear, Natasha. . . . We shall go hand in hand and I will say to them: 'This is my precious, this is my beloved daughter, my innocent daughter whom you have insulted and humiliated, but whom I, I love and bless for ever and ever!'"

"Vanya, Vanya," Natasha spoke in a weak voice, holding out her hand to me from her father's arms.

Oh, I shall never forget that at a moment like that she thought of me and called to me!

"But where is Nellie?" asked the old man, looking round.

"Oh, where is she?" cried his wife. "My darling! We're forgetting her!"

But she was not in the room. She had slipped away unnoticed into the bedroom. We went there. Nellie was standing in the corner behind the door, hiding from us in a frightened way.

"Nellie, what's the matter with you, my child?" cried the old man, putting his arm round her.

But she bent on him a strange, long gaze.

"Mamma, where's Mamma?" she uttered, as though in delirium. "Where, where is my mother?" she cried once more, stretching out her trembling hands to us, and suddenly a fearful, ghastly shriek broke from her bosom; her face worked convulsively, and she collapsed on the floor in a violent fit.

EPILOGUE



LAST RECOLLECTIONS

It was the middle of June. The day was hot and sultry; it was impossible to remain in town, where all was dust, lime, scaffolding, scorching stone, and tainted air.... But there—oh joy!—thunder rumbled in the distance; the sky darkened gradually, there came a whirl of wind driving clouds of town dust before it. A few big raindrops fell heavily on the ground, and then the whole sky seemed to open and torrents of water gushed down upon the town. When, half an hour later, the sun came out again I opened my garret window and greedily drew the fresh air into my exhausted lungs. In my exhilaration I felt ready to throw up my pen, my work, and my publisher too, and to rush off to my friends at Vasilyevsky Island. But great as the temptation was I took myself in hand and fell upon my work again with a sort of fury. At all costs I had to finish it. My publisher was demanding it and would not pay me without it. I was expected *there*, but, on the other hand, by the evening I should be free, absolutely free as the wind, and that evening would make up to me for the last two days and nights during which I had written three and a half signatures.

And at last the work is finished. I throw down my pen and get up, with a pain in my chest and my back and a heaviness in my head. I know that at that moment my nerves are badly strained, and I seem to hear the last words my old doctor had said to me:

“No, no health can stand such a strain, because it’s impossible.”

So far, however, it has been possible! My head is spinning, I can scarcely stand upright, but joy, infinite joy fills my heart. My novel is completely finished and, although I am deeply in debt to my publisher, surely he will

give me something when he finds the prize in his hands—if only fifty rubles, and it's ages since I had so much money in my pocket. Freedom and money! I snatch up my hat in delight, and with my manuscript under my arm I run at full speed to our precious Alexander Petrovich before he has gone out.

I find him in, but on the point of leaving. He, for his part, has just completed a very profitable little deal, though not a literary one, and having at last seen off a swarthy-faced little Jew, he had just spent two hours with in his study, he offers his hand to me affably, and in his soft pleasant bass inquires after my health. He is a very kind-hearted man, and, joking apart, I owe him a great deal. Is it his fault that in literature he has only been a publisher all his life? He was sharp enough to see that literature needed publishers, and he saw it very opportunely, all honour and glory to him for it!

He smiles agreeably when he learns that my story is finished and that therefore the next number of his journal is safe as far as its principal item is concerned, and wonders how I could ever have finished anything and makes a very amiable joke on the subject. Then he goes to his iron strong-box to give me the promised fifty rubles, and in the meantime holds out to me a rival journal and points to a few lines in the criticism section, where a word or two are said about my last novel.

I take a look: it's an article by "Copyist." It isn't as though I am abused nor am I praised particularly, and I am very pleased. But "Copyist" says among other things that my works generally "smelt of sweat"; in other words, that I so sweat and struggle over them, so polish them up and work them over, that the result is mawkish.

The publisher and I laugh. I inform him that it took me two nights to write my last story and that I have now written three and a half signatures in two days and two

nights, and if only "Copyist," who blames me for the excessive laboriousness and heavy deliberation of my work, knew that!

"It's your own fault though, Ivan Petrovich. Why do you get so behindhand with your work that you have to sit up at night?"

Alexander Petrovich is a most charming person, of course, though he has one particular weakness—that is, boasting of his literary judgement before the very people whom he himself suspects of knowing him through and through. But I do not feel like discussing literature with him; I receive my money and pick up my hat. Alexander Petrovich is going to his villa on the Island, and on hearing that I, too, am bound for Vasilyevsky, he amiably offers to give me a lift in his carriage.

"I've got a new carriage, you know; you haven't seen it yet, have you? It's quite nice."

We go out. The carriage is really very nice, and in these early days of his possession of it Alexander Petrovich took particular pleasure and even felt a spiritual craving to give his friends lifts in it.

In the carriage Alexander Petrovich several times starts discoursing on contemporary literature. He is quite at his ease with me, and calmly enunciates various opinions which he heard a day or two before from some of the literati whom he believes in and whose opinions he respects. Sometimes he happens to respect some very extraordinary opinions. Occasionally, too, he gets an idea wrong or misapplies it, so that the result is nonsensical. I sit listening in silence, marvelling at the versatility and whimsicality of the passions of mankind. "Here's a man," I think to myself, "who might be content with amassing a fortune; but no, he must have fame, too, literary fame, the fame of a leading publisher, a critic!"

At the actual moment he is trying to expound minutely an idea which he had heard three days ago from none

other but myself, which he had argued against at the time, but now he is giving it out as his own. But such forgetfulness is a frequent phenomenon with Alexander Petrovich, and he is famous for this innocent weakness among all who know him. How happy he is now holding forth in his *own* carriage, how satisfied with his lot, how benign! He is carrying on a scholarly, literary conversation, and even his soft, decorous bass emanates learning. Little by little he drifts into liberalism, and then voices the naively sceptical conviction that there can never be any honesty or modesty in our literature, or indeed in any other, that there is nothing but "punching each other on the nose," especially in the early stages of subscription. I think to myself that Alexander Petrovich is even inclined to regard every honest and sincere writer as a simpleton, if not a fool, for his very sincerity and honesty. This inclination of his of course is the direct result of his extreme naïveté.

But I am not listening to him any longer. At Vasilyevsky Island he lets me out of the carriage, and I hurry to my friends. Here is Thirteenth Street; here is their little house. On seeing me Anna Andreyevna shakes her finger at me, waves her arms, and says "Ssh!" to me, so that I should not make a noise.

"Nellie's only just fallen asleep, poor little thing!" she whispers to me hurriedly. "For mercy's sake, don't wake her! But she's very weak, poor darling! We're anxious about her. The doctor says it's nothing serious yet. But what sense can one get out of *your* doctor! And aren't you ashamed of yourself, Ivan Petrovich? We've waited and waited for you to dinner. . . . You've not been here for two days!"

"But I told you the day before yesterday that I shouldn't be here for two days," I whisper to Anna Andreyevna. "I had to finish my work."

"But you promised to be here to dinner today! Why

didn't you come? Nellie got up purposely, the little angel! and we put her in the easy-chair, and carried her in to dinner. 'I want to wait for Vanya with you,' she said; but our Vanya never came. Why, it'll soon be six o'clock! Where have you been gadding, you wicked sinner? She was so upset that I didn't know how to calm her. It's a good thing she's gone to sleep, poor darling. And here's Nikolai Sergeich gone to town, too (he'll be back to tea), and I'm fretting here all alone.... He's getting a post, Ivan Petrovich; but when I think it's all the way off in Perm it sends a cold chill to my heart...."

"And where's Natasha?"

"In the garden, the darling! Go to her. There's something wrong with her, too. I can't make her out. Oh, Ivan Petrovich, my heart is heavy! She assures me she's happy and content, but I don't believe her. Go to her, Vanya, and then tell me quietly what's the matter with her. Do you hear?"

But I am no longer listening to Anna Andreyevna. I am running to the garden. The little garden belongs to the house. It's about twenty-five paces long and as much in breadth, and it is all overgrown with green. There are three tall old spreading trees, a few young birch-trees, a few bushes of lilac and of honeysuckle; there are a few raspberry bushes in the corner, two beds of strawberries, and two narrow, winding paths running across the length and the breadth of the garden. The old man is delighted with it and declares that there will soon be mushrooms in it. The great thing is that Nellie has grown fond of the garden and she is often being taken out in the easy-chair on to the garden path, and Nellie is by now the idol of the household.

But here is Natasha; she welcomes me joyfully, holding out her hand. How thin she is, how pale! She, too, has only just recovered from her illness.

"Have you quite finished, Vanya?" she asks me.

"Quite, quite! And I am free for the whole evening."

"Well, thank God! Were you in too much of a hurry? Had to rewrite much?"

"Well, that goes without saying. It's all right though. When I work under such a strain my nerves get strung up to a peculiar tension; my imagination is clearer, I feel more vividly and deeply, and even my style is entirely under my control, so that work done under pressure always turns out better. So everything's all right."

"Ah, Vanya, Vanya!"

I have noticed that of late Natasha has been keeping a jealous watch over my literary success and fame. She has been reading over everything I have published in the last year, and is constantly asking me about my plans for the future, is interested in every criticism, resenting some, and is terribly keen that I should rise to a high place in the literary world. Her desires express themselves so strongly and insistently that I am quite astonished at her present outlook.

"You'll simply write yourself out, Vanya," she says to me. "You'll overstrain yourself, and you'll write yourself out; and what's more, you'll ruin your health. S. now takes two years to write a story, and N. has only written one novel in ten years. But see how polished, how finished their work is. You won't find any carelessness in it."

"Yes, but they have an income of their own and don't have to write up to time; while I'm a hack. But that's not important! Let's drop that, my dear. Well, is there any news?"

"A great deal. In the first place a letter from *him*."

"Again?"

"Yes, again."

And she handed me a letter from Alyosha. It was the third she had had since their separation. The first was sent from Moscow, and seemed to be written in a kind

of frenzy. He informed her that things had turned out so that it was impossible for him to come from Moscow to Petersburg, as they had planned at parting. In the second letter he announced that he was coming to us in a few days to hasten his marriage to Natasha, that this was settled and that nothing could prevent it. And yet it was clear from the tone of the letter that he was in despair, that outside influences were weighing heavily upon him, and that he himself did not believe what he said. He mentioned in passing that Katya was his Providence and she was his only support and comfort. I eagerly opened his third letter.

It covered two sheets of paper and was written disconnectedly and incoherently in a hurried, illegible scrawl, and was smudged with ink and tears. It began with Alyosha's renouncing Natasha, and begging her to forget him. He attempted to show that their marriage was impossible, that outside, hostile influences were stronger than anything, and that, in fact, it was only right: Natasha and he would be unhappy together because they were not equals. But he could not keep it up to the end, and suddenly abandoning his arguments and reasoning, without tearing up or discarding the first half of his letter, he admitted that he had behaved criminally to Natasha, that he was a finished man, and had not the strength to stand out against his father, who had come down to the country. He wrote that he could not express his anguish, admitted among other things that he felt confident he could make Natasha happy, began of a sudden to prove that they were absolutely equals and obstinately and angrily refuted his father's arguments; in despair he drew a picture of the lifelong bliss that would have been in store for them both, himself and Natasha, if they had married; cursed himself for his cowardice, and said farewell for ever! The letter had been written in mortal distress; he had evidently been beside himself

when he wrote it. Tears started to my eyes. Natasha handed me another letter from Katya. This letter had come in the same envelope as Alyosha's, though it was sealed up separately. Briefly, in a few lines, Katya informed Natasha that Alyosha really was much depressed, that he cried a great deal and seemed in despair, was even rather unwell, but that *she* was with him and that he would be happy. Among other things, Katya endeavoured to dissuade Natasha from thinking that Alyosha could be so quickly comforted, or that his grief was not genuine. "He will never forget you," added Katya, "indeed, he never can forget you, for his heart is not like that. He loves you immeasurably; he will always love you, and if he ever ceases loving you, if he ever leaves off grieving at the thought of you I shall cease to love him for that, at once."

I gave both letters back to Natasha; we looked at one another and said nothing; it had been the same with the other two letters; and altogether we avoided talking of the past, as if there was a tacit agreement between us. She was suffering intolerably, I saw that, but she did not want to show her feelings even before me. After her return to her father's house she had been in bed for three weeks with a feverish attack, and was only just getting over it. We did not talk much of the change in store for us either, though she knew her father had obtained a situation, and that we were soon to part. In spite of that she was so tender to me all that time, so solicitous, and took such interest in all that I was doing; she listened with such obstinate attention to all I had to tell her about myself that at first it rather weighed upon me; it seemed to me that she was trying to make up to me for the past. But this feeling soon passed off: I realized that it was something quite different, that it was simply that she loved me, loved me immensely, could not live without me or without being interested in everything that concerned

me; and I believe that no sister ever loved a brother as Natasha loved me. I knew very well that our approaching separation was a load on her heart, that Natasha was miserable; she knew, too, that I could not live without her; but of that we said nothing, though we did talk in detail of the events before us.

I asked after Nikolai Sergeich.

"I believe he'll soon be back," said Natasha, "he promised to be in to tea."

"Has he gone out about that post?"

"Yes; but there's no doubt about the post now; and I don't think there was really any need for him to go out today," she added, musing. "He might have gone tomorrow."

"Why did he go then?"

"Because I got a letter. I am like an illness with him," Natasha added, "and it's really painful to me, Vanya. He doesn't even dream of anything but me it would seem. I'm certain that he never thinks of anything except how I am, how I'm feeling, what I'm thinking. Every anxiety of mine raises an echo in his heart. I see how awkwardly he sometimes tries to control himself, and to make a pretence of not being anxious about me, how he affects to be cheerful, tries to laugh and amuse us. Mamma is not herself at such moments and doesn't believe in his laugh either, and sighs. She's so awkward too . . . an ingenuous soul," she added with a laugh. "So when I got that letter today he had to run off at once to avoid meeting my eyes. I love him more than myself, more than anyone in the world, Vanya," she added, dropping her head and pressing my hand, "even more than you. . . ."

We had walked twice up and down the garden before she began to speak again.

"Maslobojev was here today and yesterday, too," she said.

"Yes, he has taken to coming here very often lately."

"And do you know why he comes here? Mamma believes in him above everything. She thinks he understands all this sort of thing so well (the laws and all that) that he can arrange anything. You could never imagine what an idea is brewing in her head! In her heart of hearts she is very hurt and sad that I haven't become a princess. That idea gives her no peace, and I believe she has opened her heart to Maslobojev. She is afraid to speak to Father about it and wonders whether Maslobojev could do something for her, whether there is some law or something. Maslobojev, apparently, doesn't disillusion her, and she regales him with wine," Natasha added with an ironic smile.

"That's just like the rogue! But how do you know?"

"Why, Mamma has let it out to me herself . . . in hints."

"What about Nellie? How is she?" I asked.

"I'm surprised at you, Vanya, you haven't asked about her till now," said Natasha reproachfully.

Nellie was the idol of the whole household. Natasha had become extremely fond of her, and Nellie was devoted to her wholeheartedly at last. Poor child! She had never expected to find such friends, to win such love, and I was delighted to see that her embittered little heart was softening and her soul was opening to us all. She responded with painful eagerness to the love with which she was surrounded in such contrast to all her past, which had developed mistrust, resentment, and obstinacy in her. Though even now Nellie showed stubborn resistance; for a long time she had intentionally concealed from us the tears of reconciliation that burned in her eyes and only at last surrendered completely. She grew very fond of Natasha, and later on of Nikolai Sergeich, while I had become so necessary to her somehow that she grew worse if I stayed away. The last time when I parted from her for two days in order to finish my novel

I had much ado to soothe her . . . indirectly, of course. Nellie was still shy of expressing her feelings too frankly, too unrestrainedly.

We were all very worried about her. Without any discussion it was tacitly settled that she should remain forever in Nikolai Sergeich's family; but now that the day of departure was drawing nearer, she was getting worse and worse. She had been ill from the day I took her to Nikolai Sergeich's, the day of his reconciliation with Natasha. But what am I saying? She had always been ill. The disease had been gaining ground gradually, but now it developed with extraordinary rapidity. I do not understand and cannot exactly explain her complaint. Her fits, it is true, did occur somewhat more frequently than before, but the most serious symptom was exhaustion and failure of strength, a perpetual state of feverish and nervous strain, which had been so bad of late that she was unable to leave her bed. The strange thing was that the more the disease gained upon her, the softer, sweeter and more open she became with us. Three days before, as I passed her bedside, she caught my hand and drew me to her. There was no one in the room. She had grown terribly thin. Her face was flushed with fever, her eyes flashed hotly. She made a convulsively passionate motion towards me, and when I bent down to her she clasped me tightly round the neck with her dark-skinned arms, and kissed me warmly, and then at once she asked for Natasha to come to her. I called her; Nellie insisted that Natasha should sit down on her bed and look at her.

"I want to look at you too," she said. "I dreamed of you last night and I shall dream of you again tonight. I often dream of you . . . every night."

She evidently wanted to tell her something; she was overcome by emotion, but she did not understand her own feelings and could not express them.

She loved Nikolai Sergeich almost more than anyone except me. It must be said that Nikolai Sergeich loved her almost as much as Natasha. He had a wonderful gift for cheering and amusing Nellie. As soon as he came near her there were sounds of laughter and even frolicking. The sick girl would become as playful as a little child, coquetted with the old man, laughed at him, told him her dreams, always thought of some new mischief and made him tell her stories, too ; and the old man was so pleased, so happy, looking at his "little daughter Nellie," that he was more and more delighted with her every day.

"God has sent her to us to make up to us for all our suffering," he said to me once as he left Nellie, blessing her for the night as usual.

In the evenings, we all gathered together (Maslobojev was there, too, almost every evening), and our old doctor sometimes dropped in. He had become warmly attached to the Ikhmenevs. Nellie would be carried up to the round table in her easy-chair. The door would be opened on to the verandah. We had a full view of the green garden in the rays of the setting sun, and from it came the fragrance of the fresh leaves and the blossoming lilac. Nellie sat in her easy-chair, watching us all affectionately, and listening to our talk; sometimes she, too, grew animated, and gradually joined in the conversation. But at such moments we usually listened to her with uneasiness, because in her reminiscences there were subjects we did not want touched upon. Natasha and I and the Ikhmenevs all felt guilty and recognized the harm we had done her that day when tortured and quivering she had been forced to tell us all her story. The doctor was particularly opposed to these reminiscences and we usually endeavoured to change the conversation. And then Nellie would make as if she had not noticed our efforts, and would begin laughing with the doctor or with Nikolai Sergeich,

But meantime she grew worse and worse. She became extraordinarily impressionable. Her heart was beating irregularly. The doctor told me, in fact, that she might die at any moment.

I did not tell the Ikhmenevs this for fear of distressing them. Nikolai Sergeich was quite sure that she would recover in time for the journey.

"There's Papa come in," said Natasha, hearing his voice. "Let us go, Vanya."

* * *

Nikolai Sergeich, as usual, began talking loudly as soon as he had crossed the threshold. Anna Andreyevna gesticulated at him to be quiet. The old man subsided at once, and seeing Natasha and me began to tell us in a whisper, with a hurried air, of the result of his expedition. He had secured the post he was trying for and was much pleased.

"In a fortnight we can set off," he said, rubbing his hands and anxiously glancing askance at Natasha.

But she responded with a smile and embraced him so that his doubts were instantly dissipated.

"We're going, we're going, my friends!" he spoke joyfully. It's only you, Vanya, leaving you, that's the rub. . . ." (I may add here that he never once suggested that I should go with them, which, from what I know of his character, he certainly would have done . . . under other circumstances . . . that is, if he had not been aware of my love for Natasha.)

"Well, it can't be helped, friends, it can't be helped! It grieves me, Vanya; but a change of place will put new life into us all. . . . A change of place means a change of *everything!*" he added, glancing once more at his daughter.

He had faith in it and was glad of his faith.

"And Nellie?" said Anna Andreyevna.

"Nellie? Well . . . the little darling's still poorly, but surely by that time she'll be well again. She's better already, what do you think, Vanya?" he said, suddenly frightened, and he looked at me uneasily, as though it was for me to set his doubts at rest.

"How is she? How did she sleep? Nothing's been happening to her, has it? Isn't she awake now? Do you know what, Anna Andreyevna, we'll move the little table out, on to the verandah, we'll take out the samovar, our friends will be coming, and we'll all sit there and Nellie can come out to us. . . . That'll be splendid. But perhaps she's awake? I'll go in to her. . . . I'll only have a look at her. I won't wake her, don't worry!" he added, seeing that Anna Andreyevna was making signals to him again.

But Nellie was already awake. A quarter of an hour later we were all sitting as usual round the samovar at evening tea.

Nellie was carried out in her chair. The doctor and Maslobojev made their appearance. The latter brought a big bunch of lilac for Nellie, but he seemed anxious and annoyed about something.

Maslobojev, by the way, came almost every evening. I have mentioned already that all of them liked him very much, especially Anna Andreyevna, but not a word was ever spoken among us about Alexandra Semyonovna. Nor did Maslobojev make any allusion to her. Anna Andreyevna, having learned from me that Alexandra Semyonovna had not yet risen to the position of his *lawful* wife, had made up her mind that it was impossible to receive her or speak of her in the house. This decision was maintained, and was very characteristic of Anna Andreyevna. However, if it wasn't for Natasha, and still more for all that had happened to her, she would perhaps not have been so squeamish.

Nellie was particularly depressed that evening and

even preoccupied. It was as though she had had a bad dream and was brooding over it. But she was very pleased with Maslobojev's gift, and looked with delight at the flowers which we put in a glass before her.

"So you're very fond of flowers, Nellie," said the old man. "Just wait," he said eagerly. "Tomorrow . . . well, you shall see for yourself."

"Yes, I am," answered Nellie, "and I remember how once we welcomed Mamma with flowers. When we were out *there* ("out there" now meant abroad) Mamma was very ill for a whole month at one time. Heinrich and I made a plan that when she got up and came out of her bedroom for the first time, after a whole month in bed, we would decorate all the rooms with flowers. And that's what we did. Mamma told us one night that she would be sure to come down to breakfast next morning. We got up very, very early. Heinrich brought in a lot of flowers, and we decorated all the rooms with green leaves and garlands. There was ivy and something else with broad leaves, I don't know the name of, and some other leaves that catch at everything, and there were big white flowers and narcissuses—I love them better than all the other flowers—and there were roses, such splendid roses, and lots and lots of flowers. We hung them all up in garlands or put them in pots, and there were flowers that were like whole trees in big tubs; we put them in the corners and by Mamma's chair, and when Mamma came in she was astonished and awfully delighted, and Heinrich was glad . . . I remember that now."

That evening Nellie was particularly weak and high-strung. The doctor looked at her uneasily. But she was very eager to talk. And for a long time, till it was dark, she told us about her former life out *there*; we did not interrupt her. She and her mother and Heinrich had travelled a great deal together, and recollections of those days rose vividly in her memory. She spoke with emotion

of the blue skies, of the high mountains with snow and ice on them, which she had seen, of the waterfalls in the mountains; and then of the lakes and valleys of Italy, of the flowers and trees, of the villagers, of their dress, their swarthy faces and black eyes. She told us about various encounters and adventures they had had. Then she talked of great towns and palaces, of a tall church with a dome, which was suddenly illuminated with lights of different colours; then of a hot, southern town with blue skies and a blue sea. . . . Never had Nellie told us her recollections so fully. We listened to her with absorption. Till then we had only known of her reminiscences of a different kind—of a dark, grim town, with its oppressive, stupefying atmosphere, its tainted air, its costly palaces, always begrimed with dirt; with its pale dim sunlight, and its evil, half-crazy inhabitants, at whose hands she and her mother had suffered so much. And I pictured how the two of them lying close together on their poor bed in a filthy cellar, on a damp, gloomy evening had recalled their past days, their lost Heinrich, and the marvels of other lands. And I pictured Nellie, too, remembering all this alone, without her mother, while Bubnova tried by blows and brutal cruelty to break her spirit and force her into a vicious life. . . .

But at last Nellie felt faint, and she was carried indoors. Nikolai Sergeich was much alarmed and vexed that we had let her talk so much. She had a sort of fainting fit. She had had such attacks several times already. When it was over Nellie asked earnestly to see me. She wanted to say something to me alone. She begged so earnestly that the doctor himself insisted that her wish should be granted, and they all went out of the room.

"Listen, Vanya," said Nellie, when we were left alone, "I know they think that I'm going with them, but I'm not going because I can't, and I shall stay for the time with you. That's what I wanted to tell you."

I tried to dissuade her; I told her that all the Ikhmenevs loved her so and looked on her as a daughter; that they would all miss her very much. That, on the other hand, it would be hard for her to live with me; and that, much as I loved her, there was no help for it—we must part.

“No, it’s impossible!” Nellie answered emphatically, “for I often dream of Mamma now, and she tells me not to go with them but to stay here. She tells me that it was very sinful of me to leave Grandfather alone, and she always cries when she says that. I want to stay here and look after Grandfather, Vanya.”

“But you know your grandfather is dead, Nellie,” I answered, listening to her with amazement.

She thought a little and looked at me intently.

“Tell me, Vanya, tell me again how Grandfather died,” she said. “Tell me everything and don’t leave anything out.”

I was surprised at this request, but I proceeded to tell her the story in every detail. I suspected that she was delirious, or at least that after her attack her brain was not quite clear.

She listened attentively to all I told her, and I remember how her black eyes, glittering with the light of fever, watched me intently and persistently all the while I was talking. It was dark in the room by now.

“No, Vanya, he’s not dead,” she said positively, when she had heard it all and reflected for a while. “Mamma often speaks to me about Grandfather, and when I said to her yesterday: ‘But Grandfather’s dead,’ she was dreadfully grieved; she cried and told me he wasn’t, that I had been told so on purpose, but that he was walking about the streets now, begging ‘just as we used to beg,’ Mamma said to me; ‘and he keeps walking about the place where we first met him, when I fell down before him, and Azorka knew me....’”

“That was a dream, Nellie, a sick dream, for you are sick now,” I said to her.

“I thought it was only a dream myself,” said Nellie, “and I didn’t speak of it to anyone. I only waited to tell you. But today when you didn’t come and I fell asleep I dreamed of Grandfather himself. He was sitting at home, waiting for me, and was so thin and dreadful; and he told me he’d had nothing to eat for two days, nor Azorka either, and he was very angry with me, and scolded me. He told me, too, that he had no snuff at all, and that he couldn’t live without it. And he had really said that to me once before, Vanya, after Mamma died, when I went to see him. He was quite ill then and could hardly understand anything. When I heard him say that today, I thought I would go and stand on the bridge and beg for alms, and then buy him some bread and boiled potatoes and snuff. And then it’s as if I’m standing there, and I see Grandfather walking about nearby, and he’d linger a little and then come up to me, and look how much I’d got and take it. ‘That’s for bread,’ he says; ‘now get some for snuff.’ I’d beg the money, and he’d come up and take it away from me. I told him that I’d give it all to him, anyway, and would not hide any for myself. ‘No,’ he says, ‘you steal from me. Bubnova told me, too, that you were a thief, that’s why I shall never take you to live with me. Where have you put the other copper?’ I started crying because he didn’t believe me, but he wouldn’t listen to me and kept shouting: ‘You’ve stolen a copper!’ And he began to beat me right there on the bridge, and it hurt and I cried very much.... And so I’ve begun to think, Vanya, that he is certain to be alive, and that he must be walking about somewhere alone, waiting for me to come.”

I tried once more to soothe her and to persuade her it was nothing but a dream, and at last I believe I succeeded in convincing her. She said that she was afraid

to fall asleep now because she would dream of her grandfather. At last she embraced me warmly.

"But still, I can't leave you, Vanya," she said, pressing her little face to mine. "Even if it weren't for Grandfather I wouldn't leave you."

Everyone in the house was alarmed at Nellie's attack. I took the doctor aside and told him of all her sick dreams, and asked him what his final conclusion about her illness was.

"Nothing is certain yet," he answered, considering. "So far I can only surmise, watch, and observe; but nothing is certain. Recovery is impossible, anyway. She will die. I don't tell them because you begged me not to, but I am sorry and I shall suggest a consultation tomorrow. Perhaps the disease will take a different turn after the consultation. But I'm very sorry for the little girl, as though she were my own child. She's a dear, dear child! And with such a playful mind!"

Nikolai Sergeich was particularly upset.

"I tell you what I've thought of, Vanya," he said. "She's very fond of flowers. Do you know what? Let's arrange a welcome with flowers for her tomorrow when she wakes up, such as she and that Heinrich arranged for her mother, as she described today. She spoke of it with such emotion."

"I dare say she did," I said. "But emotion's just what's bad for her now."

"Yes, but pleasant emotion is a different matter. Believe me, my boy, trust my experience; pleasurable emotion does no harm; it may even cure, it is conducive to health."

The old man was, in fact, so fascinated by his own idea that he was in a perfect ecstasy about it. It was no use trying to dissuade him. I asked the doctor about it, but before the latter had time to consider the matter,

Nikolai Sergeich had snatched up his cap and had rushed off to make his arrangements.

"You know," he said to me as he went out, "there's a hothouse near here, a magnificent hothouse. The nurserymen sell flowers; one can get them cheap. It's surprising how cheap they are, really! You impress that on Anna Andreyevna or she'll be angry at the expense. So, that's that. Oh, another thing, my dear boy, where are you off to now? You are free now, aren't you? You've finished your work, so why need you hurry home? Sleep the night here, upstairs in the attic; where you slept before, do you remember? The bedstead's there and the mattress just as it was before; nothing's been touched. You'll sleep like the King of France. Eh? Do stay. Tomorrow we'll get up early. They'll bring the flowers and by eight o'clock we'll arrange the whole room together. Natasha will help us. She's got more taste than you and I, you know. Well, do you agree? Will you stay?"

It was settled that I should stay the night. Nikolai Sergeich arranged for the purchase of the flowers. The doctor and Masloboyev said good-bye and went away. The Ikhmenevs went to bed early, at eleven o'clock. As he was going, Masloboyev seemed thoughtful and on the point of saying something to me but he put it off. However, when having said good night to the old people I reached my attic, to my surprise I found him there. He was sitting at the little table waiting for me and turning over the leaves of a book.

"I turned back half-way, Vanya, because it's better to tell you now. Sit down. It's a stupid business, you see, vexatiously so, in fact."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Why, your scoundrel of a prince has enraged me a fortnight ago; and enraged me so that I'm in a rage still."

"But what's wrong? I didn't know you were still involved with the prince."

"There you go with your 'what's wrong?' as if God knows what's happened. You're for all the world like my Alexandra Semyonovna and all these insufferable females! I can't endure females. If a crow calls, it's 'what's wrong?' with them."

"Now, now, don't be angry!"

"I'm not a bit angry, but every affair ought to be looked at reasonably, and not exaggerated ... that's what I say."

He paused a little, as though he were still feeling vexed with me. I did not interrupt his silence.

"You see, Vanya," he began again, "I've come upon a clue. That's to say, I've not really come upon it, and it's not really a clue, but that's how it struck me ... that is, from certain considerations I concluded that Nellie ... perhaps ... well, in fact, is the prince's legitimate daughter."

"No!"

"There you go roaring again, 'No!' One really can't talk to these people at all!" he shouted, with a vigorous despairing gesture. "Have I told you anything positive, you feather-head? Have I told you she's been *proved to be* the prince's legitimate daughter? Have I, or have I not?"

"Listen, my dear fellow," I interrupted him in great excitement. "For God's sake don't shout, but explain things clearly and precisely. I swear I shall understand you. Don't you realize how important the matter is, and what consequences...."

"Of course there'd be consequences, but how do we get them? Where are the proofs? Things aren't done like that, and I'm telling you this in confidence now. And why I'm telling you I'll explain later. You may be sure there's

a reason for it. Listen and hold your tongue and understand that all this is a secret.

"This is how it was, you see. As soon as the prince came back from Warsaw in the winter, even before Smith died, he began investigating into this business. That is, he had begun it much earlier, a year ago. But at that time he was on the look-out for one thing, and now he was on the look-out for something else. What mattered was that he'd lost the thread. It was thirteen years since he parted from the Smith woman in Paris and abandoned her, but all that time he had kept an incessant watch on her; he knew that she was living with Heinrich, whom Nellie was talking about today; he knew she had Nellie, he knew she was ill; he knew everything, in fact, but then he suddenly lost the thread. And this seems to have happened soon after the death of Heinrich, when the Smith woman left for Petersburg. In Petersburg, of course, he would very soon have found her, whatever name she went by in Russia; but the thing was that his agents abroad misled him with false information, assuring him that she was living in an out-of-the-way little town in South Germany; they were deceived themselves through carelessness: they mistook another woman for her. So it went on for a year or more. But after a year the prince began to have doubts; certain facts had led him even earlier to suspect that it was not the right woman. Then the question arose: where did the real Smith woman get to? And it occurred to him (though he'd nothing to go upon) that she might be in Petersburg. While inquiries were being made abroad, he set other inquiries on foot here; but apparently he did not care to make use of the official channels, and he made my acquaintance. I was recommended to him: he was told this and that about me, that I took on detective work as an amateur, and so on, and so on....

"Well, so he explained the business to me; but he was

obscure about it, damn the fellow; he explained it obscurely and ambiguously. He made a lot of mistakes, repeated himself several times; he represented the same facts in different lights. . . . Well, as we all know, no matter how cunning you are you can't hide every track. I, of course, began with obsequiousness and simplicity of heart, slavishly devoted, and so on. But following the principle I've adopted once and for all and a law of nature (for it is a law of nature), I considered in the first place whether he had told me his real object, and secondly whether there was not another, unexpressed object behind the one he had expressed. For in the latter case, as probably even you, my dear soul, can grasp with your poetical brain, he was robbing me: for while one job is worth a ruble, say, another may be worth four times as much; so I should be a fool if I gave him for a ruble what was worth four. I began to look into it and make my conjectures, and bit by bit I began to come upon traces; one thing I'd draw out of him, another out of somebody else, and I'd get at a third by my own wits. You may ask me what was my idea in so doing? I'll answer, well, for one thing the prince seemed somewhat too keen about it, he seemed in a great panic about something. For after all, what had he to fear? He'd carried a girl off from her father, and when she was with child he had abandoned her. What was there remarkable in that? A charming, pleasant bit of mischief, and nothing more. That was nothing for a man like the prince to be afraid of! Yet he was afraid. . . . And that made me suspicious. I came on some very interesting traces, my boy, through Heinrich, by the way. He was dead, of course, but from one of his cousins (now married to a baker here, in Petersburg) who had been passionately in love with him in the old days, and who had gone on loving him for fifteen years, in spite of the stout papa baker to whom she had incidentally born eight children; from this cousin, I tell you, I managed by means of

various intricate manoeuvres to learn an important fact, that Heinrich, after the German habit, used to write her letters and diaries, and before his death he sent her some of his papers. The silly fool didn't understand what was important in the letters, and only understood the parts where he talked of the moon, of 'mein lieber Augustin,' and of Wieland, too, I believe. But I got hold of the necessary facts, and through those letters I hit on a new clue. I found out, for instance, about Mr. Smith, about the money filched from him by his daughter, and about the prince's getting hold of that money. And at last, in the midst of exclamations, rigmaroles, and allegories of all sorts, I got a glimpse of the essential truth; that is, Vanya, you understand, nothing positive. That lout Heinrich purposely kept mum about it all, and only hinted at it; well, and these hints, all this taken together, began to blend into a heavenly harmony in my mind: the prince was legally married to the Smith woman and no mistake! Where they were married, how, when precisely, whether abroad or here, the whereabouts of the documents—is all unknown. In fact, friend Vanya, I've been tearing my hair out in despair, searching for them, in fact, I've hunted day and night.

"I unearthed Smith at last too, but he went and died. I hadn't even time to get a look at him while he was alive. Then, through chance, I suddenly learned that a woman that sounded suspicious to me had died in Vasilyevsky Island. I made inquiries and got on the track. I rushed off to Vasilyevsky, and there it was, do you remember, we met? I made a big haul that time. In short, Nellie was a great help to me at that point...."

"Listen," I interrupted, "surely you don't suppose that Nellie knows?"

"What?"

"That she is Prince Valkovsky's daughter?"

"Why, you know yourself that she's the prince's daughter," he answered, looking at me with angry reproach. "Why such idle questions, you foolish fellow? What matters is that she not only knows she's the prince's daughter, but that she's his *legitimate* daughter—do you understand that?..."

"It can't be!" I cried.

"I also told myself it couldn't be at first, and even say so now at times. But it turns out that it *could be* and in all probability *it is*."

"No, Maslobojev, it can't be, your imagination is running away with you!" I cried. "She doesn't know anything about it, and what's more she *is* an illegitimate child. If the mother had had any documentary evidence to produce at all, would she have endured her bitter lot, as miserable as it was here in Petersburg, and what's more, have left her child to such an utterly forlorn fate? Nonsense! It's impossible!"

"I've thought the same myself; in fact, it's a puzzle to me to this day. But then, again, the thing is that the Smith woman was the craziest and crankiest woman in the world. She was an extraordinary woman; just consider all the circumstances: her romanticism—all that rubbish, loftier than the stars themselves, exaggerated to its wildest and craziest pitch. Take one point: from the very beginning she dreamed of something like a heaven upon earth, of angels; her love was boundless, her faith was limitless, and I'm convinced that she went mad with grief afterwards, not because he got tired of her and deserted her, but because she was deceived in him, because he was *capable* of deceiving her and abandoning her, because her angel was turned to mud, had sullied and humiliated her. Her romantic and irrational soul could not endure this transformation. And above all the insult: do you realize what an insult it was? In her horror and, above all, her pride, she shrank from him with infinite contempt. She

broke all ties, tore up all her papers, scorned the money, forgetting that it was not hers but her father's, refused it as so much dirt and dust in order to crush by her spiritual grandeur the man who had deceived her, to look upon him as having robbed her and to have the right to despise him all her life, and very likely she said then too that she considered it a dishonour to call herself his wife. We have no divorce in Russia, but *de facto* they were separated, and how could she ask him for help after that! Remember what she, in her madness, said to Nellie on her death-bed: 'Don't go to them; work, perish, but don't go to them, whoever may call you.' (That is she was still dreaming that she would be sought out, and therefore there'd be an opportunity for revenge, a chance to crush the seeker with contempt once more. In short, she fed on spiteful dreams instead of bread.) I've got a great deal out of Nellie, old chap; in fact, I still do sometimes. Of course her mother was ill, in consumption; that disease particularly develops bitterness and every sort of irritability, yet I know for certain, through a crony of Bubnova's, that she did write to the prince, yes, to the prince, to the prince himself...."

"She wrote! And did he get the letter?" I cried.

"That's just it, I don't know whether he did or not. On one occasion the Smith woman approached that crony. (Do you remember that painted drab at Bubnova's? She's in the penitentiary now.) Well, she'd written the letter and she gave it to her to deliver, but didn't send it after all and took it back. That was three weeks before her death.... A significant fact; if once she had brought herself to send it, even though she did take it back, she might have sent it some other time. And so I don't know if she sent it or not. But there is one reason for believing that she did not: the prince, I fancy, only found out for *certain* that she had been living in Petersburg, and where exactly, after she had died. I can imagine his relief!"

"Yes, I remember Alyosha mentioned some letter that his father was very much pleased about, but that was quite lately, not more than two months ago. Well, go on, go on. What of your dealings with the prince?"

"What of them? Understand, I had a complete moral conviction, but not a single positive proof, *not a single one*, in spite of all my efforts. A critical position! I should have had to make inquiries abroad. But where? I didn't know. I realized, of course, that I was in for a hard fight, that I could only scare him by hints, pretend I knew more than I really did...."

"Well, what then?"

"He wasn't taken in, but anyway he was scared; so scared that he's in a funk even now. We had several meetings. What a Lazarus he made himself out! Once in a moment of effusion he started telling me the whole story. That was when he thought I knew all about it. He told it well, frankly, with feeling—of course he was lying shamelessly. It was then I took the measure of his fear for me. For a time I pretended to be an awful simpleton and made it clear to him that I was acting. I tried to scare him awkwardly—that is awkwardly on purpose. I purposely treated him to a little rudeness, began to threaten him, all that he might take me for a simpleton, and let something out. He saw through it, the scoundrel! Another time I pretended to be drunk. That didn't work either—he's cunning. Can you understand that, Vanya? I had to find out how far he was afraid of me, and at the same time to make him believe I knew more than I did."

"Well, and what was the result?"

"Nothing came of it. I needed proofs, facts, and I hadn't got them. He only realized one thing, that I might nevertheless make a scandal. And, of course, a scandal was the one thing he was afraid of, and he was the more afraid of it because he had begun to form ties here. You know he's going to be married, don't you?"

"No."

"Next year. He picked out his future bride a whole year ago; she was only fourteen then. She's fifteen now, still in pinafores, poor thing! Her parents are elated. Do you see how anxious he must have been for his wife to die. This one's a general's daughter, a moneyed little girl—heaps of money! You and I will never make a marriage like that, friend Vanya.... Only there's something I shall never forgive myself for as long as I live!" cried Maslobojev, bringing his fist down on the table. "That he got the better of me a fortnight ago ... the scoundrel!"

"How so?"

"It was like this. I saw he knew I'd nothing positive to go upon; and I felt at last that the longer I dragged the matter on the sooner he'd realize that there was nothing I could do. Well, so I consented to take two thousand from him."

"You took two thousand!"

"In silver, Vanya; it stuck in my throat, but I took it. Was it a mere two thousand that a job like that could have fetched! It was a humiliation to take it. I felt as though he'd spat upon me. He said to me: 'I haven't paid you yet, Maslobojev, for the work you did before.' (But he had paid long ago, the hundred and fifty rubles as we'd agreed.) 'Well, now I'm going away; here's two thousand, and so I hope *everything's* settled between us.' So I answered: 'Quite settled, prince,' and I didn't dare to look into his nasty mug. I thought it would be plainly written upon it: 'Well, that's as much as you'll ever get out of me. I'm simply giving it to the fool out of good nature!' I don't remember how I got away from him!"

"But that was base, Maslobojev," I cried. "What have you done to Nellie!"

"It wasn't simply base ... it was criminal ... it was loathsome. It was ... it was ... there's no word to describe it!"

"Good heavens! He ought at least to provide for Nellie!"

"Of course he ought! But how's one to force him to? Frighten him? There's not a chance; he won't be frightened; you see, I've taken the money. I admitted to him myself that all he had to fear from me was only worth two thousand rubles. I fixed that price on myself! How's one going to frighten him now?"

"And can it be that everything's lost for Nellie?" I cried, almost in despair.

"Not a bit of it!" cried Masloboyev hotly, starting up. "No, I won't let him off like that. I shall begin all over again, Vanya. I've made up my mind to. What if I have taken two thousand? To hell with it! I'll consider I took it for the insult, because he cheated me, the rascal, and therefore laughed at me. He cheated me and laughed at me, into the bargain! No, I'm not going to let myself be laughed at.... Now, I shall start with Nellie, Vanya. From things I've noticed I'm perfectly convinced that she has the key to the whole business. She knows *all*—all about it! Her mother herself had told her. In delirium, in despondency, she might well have told her. She had no one to complain to. Nellie was at hand, so she told Nellie. And we might come upon some documents," he added gleefully, rubbing his hands. "You understand now, Vanya, why I'm always hanging about here? In the first place, out of my feeling of friendship for you, of course; but chiefly to keep a watch on Nellie; and another thing, Vanya, whether you like it or not, you've got to help me, because you have some influence with Nellie!..."

"I certainly will, I swear!" I cried. "And I hope, Masloboyev, that your best efforts will be for Nellie's sake, for the sake of the poor, injured orphan, and not only for your own advantage."

"But what business is it of yours whose advantage I do my best for, you blessed innocent? As long as it's done,

that's what matters! Of course it's for the orphan's sake, that's only common humanity. But don't you judge me too harshly, Vanya, if I do myself a good turn too. I'm a poor man, and he mustn't dare to insult the poor. He's robbing me of my own, and he's cheated me into the bargain, the scoundrel. D'you think I'm going to let the swindler get away with it? Morgen früh!"

* * *

But our flower festival did not come off next day. Nellie was worse and could not leave her room.

And she never left that room again.

She died a fortnight later. In that fortnight of her last agony she never quite came to herself, or escaped from her strange fantasies. Her mind seemed to have dimmed. She was firmly convinced up to the day of her death that her grandfather was calling her and was angry with her for not coming, was rapping with his stick at her, and was telling her to go begging to get bread and snuff for him. She often cried in her sleep, and when she waked said that she had seen her mother.

Only at times she seemed fully to regain her faculties. Once we were left alone together. She turned to me and clutched my hand with her thin, feverishly hot little hand.

"Vanya," she said, "when I die, marry Natasha."

I believe this idea had been constantly in her mind for a long time. I smiled at her without speaking. Seeing my smile she smiled too, and with a mischievous look she shook her finger at me and at once began kissing me.

Three days before her death on an exquisite summer evening, she asked us to draw the blinds and open the window in her bedroom. The window looked into the garden. She gazed a long while at the thick, green foliage, at the setting sun, and suddenly asked the others to leave us alone.

"Vanya," she said in a voice, hardly audible, for she had grown very weak. "I shall die soon, very soon. I want you to remember me. I'll leave you this as a keepsake." (And she showed me a large amulet which hung with her baptismal cross on her breast.) "Mamma left it to me when she was dying. And so when I die you take it off me, and read what's in it. I shall tell them all today to give it to you and no one else. And when you read what's written in it, go to *him* and tell him that I had died, but that I had not forgiven him. Tell him, too, that I've been reading the Gospel lately. It says there we must forgive all our enemies. Well, I've read that, but I've not forgiven *him* all the same; for when Mamma was dying and could still talk, the last thing she said was: '*I curse him.*' And so I curse him too, not on my account but on Mamma's. Tell him how Mamma died, how I was left alone at Bubnova's; tell him how you saw me there, tell him everything, everything, and tell him I preferred to be at Bubnova's than to go to him. . . ."

As she said this, Nellie turned pale, her eyes flashed, her heart began beating so violently that she sank back on the pillow, and for a minute or two she could not utter a word.

"Call them, Vanya," she said at last in a faint voice. "I want to say good-bye to them all. Good-bye, Vanya!"

She embraced me warmly for the last time. All the others came in. The old man could not grasp the fact that she was dying; he could not admit the idea. Up to the last moment he argued with all of us, maintaining that she would certainly get well. He was quite emaciated with anxiety; he had been sitting by Nellie's bedside for days and even nights on end. The last few nights he had not slept at all. He tried to anticipate Nellie's slightest whims, her slightest wishes, and wept bitterly when he left her room and joined us, but a minute later began hoping again and assuring us that she would soon get

well. He filled her room with flowers. Once he bought her a great bunch of exquisite white and red roses; he had to go to a shop very far away to get them and bring them to his little Nellie. . . . She was extremely moved by all this. She could not help responding with her whole heart to the love that surrounded her on all sides. That evening, the evening of her good-bye to us, the old man could not bring himself to say good-bye to her for ever. Nellie smiled at him, and all the evening tried to seem cheerful; she joked with him and even laughed. . . . We left her room, feeling almost hopeful, but next day she could not speak. And two days later she died.

I remember how the old man decked her little coffin with flowers, and gazed in despair at her wasted face, smiling in death, and at her hands crossed on her breast. He wept over her as though she had been his own child. Natasha and all of us tried to comfort him, but he was inconsolable and fell seriously ill after her funeral.

Anna Andreyevna herself gave me the little bag off Nellie's neck. In it was her mother's letter to Prince Valkovsky. I read it on the day of Nellie's death. She cursed the prince, said she could not forgive him, described all the latter part of her life, all the horrors to which she was leaving Nellie, and besought him to do something for the child.

"She is yours," she wrote. "She is *your* daughter, and *you know* that she is *really your legal daughter*. I have told her to go to you when I am dead and to give you this letter. If you do not repulse Nellie, perhaps I shall forgive you and *there*, on the day of judgement, I myself will stand before the throne of the Almighty and beg Him to forgive you your sins. Nellie knows what is in this letter. I have read it to her. I have told her *all*; she knows *everything, everything. . . .*"

But Nellie had not done her mother's bidding. She had

known everything, but she had not gone to the prince, and had died unforgiving.

When we returned from Nellie's funeral, Natasha and I went out into the garden. The day was hot, sparkingly clear. A week later they were to leave. Natasha turned a long, strange look upon me.

"Vanya," she said, "Vanya, it was a dream, wasn't it?"

"What was a dream?" I asked.

"All, all," she answered, "everything, all this past year. Vanya, why did I destroy your happiness?"

And in her eyes I read:

"We might have been happy together for ever."



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